PART TWO

Nathan the Wise

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

SULTAN SALADIN
SITTAH, *his sister*
NATHAN, *a rich Jew in Jerusalem*
RECHA, *his adopted daughter*
DAJA, *a Christian woman, but in the Jew's house as Recha's governess*
A YOUNG KNIGHT TEMPLAR
A DERVISH
THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM
A MONK
AN EMIR[1]
along with various Mamelukes[2] *of Saladin*

ACT 1

Scene 1

Scene: A hall in Nathan's house. Nathan returning from a voyage. Daja coming toward him.

DAJA: It's him! Nathan! Thank God you're finally back.

NATHAN: Yes, Daja. Thank God! But why do you say "finally"? Was I supposed to come back sooner? Could I have come back sooner? Babylon is a good two hundred miles from Jerusalem, at least by the twisted route I had to take. And collecting debts isn't the sort of business you can do in a hurry.

DAJA: Oh Nathan, how miserable things could have been! Your house . . .

[1]A military governor.
[2]Slave soldiers.

NATHAN: There was a fire. I've already heard about it. God willing, I've already heard everything.

DAJA: It might have burned to the ground.

NATHAN: Then, Daja, we would have built a new one, a nicer one.

DAJA: Yes, of course. But *Recha* was a hair's breadth from being burned to death.

NATHAN: Burned? Who? My Recha? That I hadn't heard. Now then! In that case I wouldn't have needed a house. A hair's breadth from being burned to death! She *is* dead, isn't she? Tell me the truth! Just let it out! Kill me; don't torture me any longer. She's dead.

DAJA: If she were, would you hear it first from me?

NATHAN: Then why did you scare me like that? Oh Recha! My Recha!

DAJA: Yours? Your Recha?

NATHAN: If I ever had to get used to not calling her my child!

DAJA: Do you call everything you have *yours* with equal justification?

NATHAN: Nothing with greater justification! Everything else I have, Nature and Fortune have given me. For this possession alone I have Virtue to thank.

DAJA: Oh, how dearly you make me pay for your goodness, Nathan! If goodness with such intentions can still be called goodness.

NATHAN: With such intentions? With what intentions?

DAJA: My conscience . . .

NATHAN: Daja, let me tell you one thing first of all . . .

DAJA: My conscience . . .

NATHAN: What lovely material I bought you in Babylon. So rich, and so rich in taste! I've hardly brought better material for Recha herself.

DAJA: What does that help when my conscience, I have to tell you, cannot be numbed any longer?

NATHAN: And how you will love the pins, the earrings, the necklaces and rings I brought you from Damascus! I can't wait to see . . .

DAJA: So that's the way you are! If you could do nothing but give gifts! Nothing but give gifts!

NATHAN: Just take as happily as I give—and be quiet!

DAJA: And be quiet! Who would ever doubt, Nathan, that you are honesty, generosity itself? And yet . . .

NATHAN: Yet I'm only a Jew. So that's what you want to say?

DAJA: What I want to say, you know better than I do.

NATHAN: Then be quiet!

DAJA: I am quiet. What punishable things in God's eyes are happening here, which I can't stop, can't change, can't . . . it will come back to you!

NATHAN: Come back to me! But then where is she? Where is she? Don't deceive me! Does she know that I've arrived?

DAJA: That I ask you! She's still trembling with fright in every nerve. Her imagination still paints fire on everything it shows her. Her spirit is awake while she sleeps, it sleeps while she's awake: she's sometimes less than an animal, sometimes more than an angel.

NATHAN: Poor child! What are we human beings!

DAJA: This morning she lay a long time with closed eyes, and was like a dead person. Suddenly she awoke and cried, "Listen! Listen! My father's camels are coming! Listen! His own gentle voice!" Then her eyes closed again, and her head, which had been leaning on her arm, fell onto the pillow. I looked past the gate and saw: you really were coming! You really were coming! What a miracle! The whole time her entire soul was only with you—and him.

NATHAN: With him? With whom?

DAJA: With the one who saved her from the fire.

NATHAN: Who was that? Who? Where is he? Who saved my Recha? Who?

DAJA: A young Knight Templar who a few days earlier had been brought here as a prisoner, and who was then pardoned by Saladin.

NATHAN: What? A Templar whom Sultan Saladin left with his life? Recha couldn't have been saved by a lesser miracle? God!

DAJA: Without the one who bet his unexpected winnings again, it would have been the end of her.

NATHAN: Where is this noble man, Daja? Where is he? Lead me to his feet. You must have given him all the treasures I left you, right? Given him everything? Promised him more? Much more?

DAJA: How could we?

NATHAN: No? You didn't?

DAJA: He came, and no one knows from where. He went, and no one knows where. Without the knowledge of anyone in the house, led

only by his ear, with his coat spread widely in front of him, he bravely pushed through the flames and smoke after the voice that called to us for help. Just as we gave him up for lost he stood before us, lifting her up with his strong arms. Cold and unmoved by our cheers of thanks, he set his prize down, pushed through the crowd and disappeared!

NATHAN: Not forever, I hope.

DAJA: After a few days we saw him walking back and forth under the palms that shade the grave of the Resurrected One.[3] I approached him with delight, thanked, exalted, summoned, begged—that he would once more see the pious creature who could not rest until she cried out her thanks at his feet.

NATHAN: Well?

DAJA: In vain! He was deaf to our plea, and poured out bitter scorn onto me especially . . .

NATHAN: Until you were scared off . . .

DAJA: Just the opposite! I approached him again every day, let him taunt me every day. What I didn't suffer from him! What I wouldn't have happily endured! But for a long time he hasn't come to visit the palms that shade the grave of the Resurrected One. And no one knows where he's gone. You're surprised? You're thinking?

NATHAN: I'm thinking about what kind of impression that must have made on a mind such as Recha's. To find herself so scorned by the one she feels herself so compelled to revere; to be so repulsed, and yet so attracted. Truly the head and heart must quarrel for a long time before misanthropy or melancholy wins. Often neither wins. And imagination, which intervenes in the quarrel, makes dreamers in whom the head sometimes plays the heart and the heart sometimes plays the head. It's a bad exchange! The latter, if I know Recha, is Recha's case. She's smitten.

DAJA: But she's so pious, so kind!

NATHAN: She's still smitten.

DAJA: She's especially smitten with one idea. It's that her Templar is not of this earth, but of the angels in whose protection her little heart has trusted since childhood; that he came from the cloud that veiled him into the fire that swept around her, and took the form of

[3]That is, Jesus.

a Templar. Don't smile! Who knows? At least leave her the illusion in which Jew and Christian and Muslim unite. Such a sweet illusion!

NATHAN: And so sweet to me! Go, honest Daja, go. See how she is, see if I can speak to her. Then I will look for the wild, moody Guardian Angel. And if it still pleases him to linger among us here below, to play the Knight so rudely, I will certainly find him and bring him here.

DAJA: You undertake much.

NATHAN: Then make room next to the sweet illusion for the even sweeter truth. For, Daja, believe me: to a human being another human being is always dearer than an angel. So will you not be angry with me when you see the angel worshipper cured?

DAJA: You are so good, and at the same time so bad! I'm going! But listen, look! Here she comes.

Scene 2

Recha and the previous.

RECHA: Is that you, my father? Is it really you? I thought you'd only sent your voice to me. Why do you hesitate? What mountains, what deserts, what streams still separate us? I can feel your breath, but you're not hurrying to embrace your Recha, who meanwhile burned to death! Nearly, nearly burned to death! Just nearly. Don't shudder! It's a nasty way to die, burning. Oh!

NATHAN: My child! My dear child!

RECHA: You had to cross the Euphrates, Tigris, Jordan, who knows how many waters altogether? How often the thought made me quiver before fire came so close to me. But since the fire came so close to me dying in water seems delightful, refreshing, salvation. But you haven't drowned and I, I haven't burned. We must rejoice and praise God! He, he carried you and your boat across the fickle streams on the wings of *invisible* angels. He, he made my angel *visible,* so I saw his white wings as he carried me through the fire.

NATHAN: [*Aside:* White wings! Yes, yes! The waving white coat of the Knight Templar.]

RECHA: Visibly, visibly he carried me through the fire, his wings waving. In this way I, I saw an angel face to face. And *my* angel.

NATHAN: Recha would be worth it. And she would see nothing more beautiful in him than he would in her.

RECHA: [*smiling*] Whom are you flattering, my father? The angel, or yourself?

NATHAN: But if only a human being, a human being as nature makes every day, had rendered you this service, he should be an angel to you. He should and he would.

RECHA: Not that kind of angel. No! A real one. It was truly a real one! Didn't you yourself teach me of the possibility that it is through angels that God does good, even miracles, to those who love him? Did you not teach me that he can do miracles? And I love him truly.

NATHAN: And he loves you. And every hour he does miracles for you and your fellow creatures. Yes, he has always done that for you.

RECHA: I like to hear that.

NATHAN: Why? Just because it would sound really natural, really ordinary, if an actual Templar had saved you, should it therefore be any less of a miracle? The greatest miracle is that the true, genuine miracles can and should become ordinary. Without this general miracle, a thinking person would hardly use the word "miracle" to describe those things that seem miraculous to children, who with open mouths stare only at the most unusual and the newest things.

DAJA: [*to Nathan*] Do you want to explode her already overstressed brain with such subtleties?

NATHAN: Leave me be! Wouldn't it be enough of a miracle to my Recha that a *man* saved her, who by no small miracle had just been saved himself. Yes, no small miracle! For who has ever heard of Saladin sparing a Templar? Of a Templar ever asking or hoping to be spared? Ever offering him for his freedom more than the leather belt that bears his sword; and at the most his dagger?

RECHA: That proves it to me, my father. Precisely for that reason it could not have been a Templar. It only seemed to be. No imprisoned Templar could ever come to Jerusalem without coming to certain death. Yet no one goes so freely around Jerusalem. How could such a man have voluntarily saved me at night?

NATHAN: See? How sensible. Now, Daja, say something. I have it from you that he was sent here as a prisoner. Without a doubt you know more.

DAJA: Well, yes. That *is* said. At the same time it is said that Saladin pardoned the Templar because he so greatly resembled a brother he especially loved. But as it has been more than twenty years since this brother has been dead—I don't know what his name was, I don't know where he was—it sounds so very, so very unbelievable, that the whole thing probably just isn't true.

NATHAN: But Daja! Why should that be so unbelievable? And not because—as sometimes happens—you want to believe something even more unbelievable? Why should Saladin, who in general loves his brothers and sisters so much, not have been able in his younger years to have a special love for one of his brothers? Don't two faces ever resemble one another? Is an old impression necessarily lost? Does it no longer have the same effect? Since when? What part of this is unbelievable? And indeed, wise Daja, would this no longer be a miracle to you? And only *your* miracles have . . . deserve, I would like to say, to be believed.

DAJA: You're mocking me.

NATHAN: Because you mock me. Still, Recha, your rescue remains a miracle, only possible for Him who likes to guide the most serious decisions, the most outlandish plans of kings, with the weakest threads. That's his game, if not his mockery.

RECHA: My father! My father, if I'm wrong, you know, I don't like to be wrong.

NATHAN: Even more, you like to learn. Look! A forehead, arched this way or that. The curve of a nose leading this way or that. Eyebrows that slither this way or that on a sharp or dull bone; a line, a joint, a corner, a fold, a something, a nothing, on a wild European's face . . . and you escape a fire, in Asia! Isn't that a miracle, miracle-greedy people? Why should you trouble an angel?

DAJA: What harm does it do—Nathan, if I may speak—in all this to prefer to think you've been saved by an angel instead of a man? Wouldn't you feel that much closer to the first incomprehensible cause of your salvation?

NATHAN: Pride! And nothing more than pride! The iron pot wants to be pulled out of the fire by silver tongs in order to fancy itself a pot of silver. Bah! And what harm does it do, you ask. What harm does it do? What good does it do, I should like to ask. For your "feeling so much closer to God" is nonsense or blasphemy. It only harms; yes, it really harms. Come! Listen to me. Isn't it true that for this

being that saved you—whether it is an angel or a man—that for this being you two, and you especially,[4] would wish to do great services? Isn't it so? Now, for an angel, what services, what great services could you do? You could thank him. You could sigh to him, pray to him. You could melt in delight over him. On his holiday you could fast, give alms.[5] All nothing! For it seems to me still that only you and your companion profit more from all this than he does. He won't get fat from your fasting, won't get rich from your charity, won't become more glorious from your delight, won't grow more powerful from your trust. Isn't it so? But if he's a man . . .

DAJA: But a man would have given us more of an opportunity to *do* something for him. And God knows how ready we would have been for this! But he so fully wanted, needed nothing, was in himself, so content with himself, as only angels are, as only angels can be.

RECHA: Finally, when he just disappeared . . .

NATHAN: Disappeared? What do you mean, disappeared? Was no longer to be seen among the palms? How? Or have you really already looked for him?

DAJA: Now we haven't done that.

NATHAN: No, Daja? No? Now you'll see what harm it does! Cruel worshippers! What if this angel were now—now sick!

RECHA: Sick!

DAJA: Sick! He can't be!

RECHA: What cold shivers have overcome me! Daja! My forehead, normally so warm, feel! It's suddenly ice.

NATHAN: He's a Frank,[6] not used to this climate. He's young, not used to the hard work of his order, not used to hunger, to watches.

RECHA: Sick! Sick!

DAJA: Only Nathan thinks it possible.

NATHAN: He's lying there now! Has neither friends nor money to attract friends.

RECHA: Ah, my father!

[4]Nathan means Recha.

[5]Nathan is referring to the custom of celebrating saints' days.

[6]A term generally used to identify people coming from the area that corresponds to modern Germany.

NATHAN: Lying without help, without advice or encouraging words, prey to pain and death there!

RECHA: Where? Where?

NATHAN: He, who threw himself into the fire for someone he'd never known or seen—it was enough that she was a human being . . .

DAJA: Nathan, be gentle to her!

NATHAN: He who, to spare her the obligation of thanking him, didn't want to know or see the one he saved . . .

DAJA: Spare her, Nathan!

NATHAN: Didn't ask to see her again, unless he should have to save her a second time—it's enough that she's a human being.

DAJA: Stop and look!

NATHAN: He who, dying, has nothing to comfort himself with but the consciousness of this deed!

DAJA: Stop! You're killing her!

NATHAN: And you've killed him! You could have killed him. Recha! Recha! It's medicine, not poison, that I'm giving you. He's alive! Wake up! He's probably not even sick, not even sick!

RECHA: Really? Not dead? Not sick?

NATHAN: Really, not dead! For God still rewards good deeds done here. Oh Recha! But don't you understand how much easier *pious worship* is than *doing good*? How happily the laziest person just piously worships—though he's sometimes unaware of the goal—to avoid having to do good?

RECHA: Ah, my father! Never, never leave your Recha alone again! Isn't it so, he might be traveling.

NATHAN: Oh come on, of course not. But I see over there a Muslim is curiously inspecting my loaded camels. Do you know him?

DAJA: Ha! Your dervish.[7]

NATHAN: Who?

DAJA: Your dervish, your chess partner!

NATHAN: Al-Hafi? Is that Al-Hafi?

DAJA: Now the Sultan's treasurer.

NATHAN: What? Al-Hafi? Are you dreaming again? It's him! It's really him! He's coming. Go inside, you two! I wonder what I'll hear.

[7]A dervish is an ascetic and mystical Muslim.

Scene 3

Nathan and the dervish.

DERVISH: Open your eyes, why don't you, as wide as you can!

NATHAN: Is that you, or isn't it? In such splendor, a dervish! . . .

DERVISH: Well, why not? Can't a dervish become anything, anything at all?

NATHAN: Oh yes, of course, certainly! It's just that I always thought the dervish, the true dervish, wouldn't ever want to become anything but a dervish.

DERVISH: By the Prophet![8] That I'm not a true dervish may well be. But when you have to . . .

NATHAN: Have to! A dervish! A dervish has to? No one has to have to, but a dervish has to?[9] What does he have to do?

DERVISH: What he's asked to do and thinks is good: that's what a dervish has to do.

NATHAN: By our God! You've truly said it. Let me hug you, man. You're still my friend?

DERVISH: Shouldn't you first ask what I've become?

NATHAN: Despite what you've become!

DERVISH: And what if I'd become a guy who works for the state and whose friendship was awkward for you?

NATHAN: If you're still a dervish in your heart, I'll risk it. The guy who works for the state is nothing but his uniform.

DERVISH: Which also deserves respect. What do you think? Guess! What would I be at your court?

NATHAN: A dervish; nothing else. Though on the side, probably, a cook.

DERVISH: Well then! And unlearn my trade with you. A cook! Not a waiter too? Admit that Saladin knows me better. I've become his treasurer.

NATHAN: You? His?

DERVISH: Admittedly only for his smaller treasury, since his father still manages the larger one. His household treasury.

[8]An oath referring to the Prophet Muhammad (570–632), the founder of Islam.

[9]The German original is literally, "No human being must must, and a dervish must?" *(Kein Mensch muss müssen, und ein Derwisch müsste?)*

NATHAN: His household is big.

DERVISH: And bigger than you think, since every beggar belongs to his household.

NATHAN: But Saladin hates beggars so much . . .

DERVISH: That he sets out to get rid of them, even if he has to become a beggar himself.[10]

NATHAN: Splendid! That's just what I mean.

DERVISH: He is splendid, except for one thing! Every day at sunset his treasury is much emptier than empty. The wave that comes so high in the morning is long gone by afternoon.

NATHAN: Because canals devour, and to fill or to stop them is equally impossible.

DERVISH: Exactly!

NATHAN: I'm familiar with that!

DERVISH: Of course there's little left when princes are vultures in the midst of carrion, but when they're carrion in the midst of vultures there's ten times less.

NATHAN: But no, dervish! No!

DERVISH: That's easy for you to say! Tell me, what will you give me if I give you my job?

NATHAN: What does your job bring you?

DERVISH: Me? Not much. But you, you could really profit from it.[11] If there's an ebb in the treasury, as there often is, you just open your flood-gates: offer an advance and take whatever interest you like.

NATHAN: And interest on interest on interest?

DERVISH: Of course!

NATHAN: Until my capital is nothing but interest.

DERVISH: That doesn't tempt you? Then write the divorce letter for our friendship! Since I was truly counting on you.

NATHAN: Truly? Why then? Why?

[10]Saladin enjoyed a reputation for being extraordinarily generous in giving charity. Cf. Document 3.

[11]Lessing uses the verb *wuchern,* which comes from the noun *Wucher,* or usury. He thereby alludes to the prejudice according to which Jews were especially susceptible to usury, or the charging of excessive interest on loans; yet Nathan responds by ridiculing the practice, thus undermining the prejudice.

DERVISH: To help me fulfill my office with honor, your purse would always be open to me. You're shaking your head?

NATHAN: Now we understand each other! Here's the difference. You? Why not you? Al-Hafi the dervish is always welcome to everything I have. But Al-Hafi the defterdar[12] to the Sultan, who, whom—

DERVISH: As I suspected. That you were always as good as you were clever, as clever as you were wise! Patience! What you distinguish in Al-Hafi will soon be separated again. See this honorable costume that Saladin gave me. Before it fades, before it turns to rags, the proper clothing of a dervish, hang it on a hook in Jerusalem, and I'll be on the Ganges,[13] where I'll walk lightly and barefoot on the hot sand with my teachers.

NATHAN: That's more like you!

DERVISH: And play chess with them.

NATHAN: Your favorite thing!

DERVISH: Just think what led me astray! So that I myself could no longer beg? So that I could play the rich man with beggars? That I would be able to make a rich beggar into a poor rich man in a flash?

NATHAN: Certainly not that.

DERVISH: Something much more tasteless! For the first time I felt flattered, flattered by Saladin's goodhearted madness . . .

NATHAN: Which was?

DERVISH: "Only the beggar could know how a beggar feels; only a beggar would have learned the right way to give to beggars. Your predecessor," he said, "was too cold, too raw. He gave so ungraciously when he gave; first inquired so vehemently into the situation of the receiver; never satisfied that he was lacking, also wanted to know the cause of the lack, in order to measure the cause stingily against the offering. Al-Hafi wouldn't do that! He would never show himself so reluctantly charitable to Saladin! Al-Hafi isn't like clogged pipes that take clear and still water and return it dirty and bubbling. Al-Hafi thinks; Al-Hafi feels as I do!" So lovely the bird-catcher's pipe sounded, until the foolish bird was in the net. What an arrogant fool I've been! A fool's fool!

[12]Persian for treasurer.
[13]A major river in India, sacred to Hindus (though not to Muslims).

NATHAN: Easy, my dervish, easy!

DERVISH: What? It wouldn't be foolishness to oppress, impoverish, plunder, torment, strangle; and to want to appear as a philanthropist to a few? It wouldn't be foolishness to mimic the gentleness of God, who without prejudice spreads himself over good and evil and plain and desert, in sunshine and rain, and not always to have God's full hand? Well? Wouldn't it be arrogance . . .

NATHAN: Enough! Stop!

DERVISH: Just let me mention *my* arrogance! Well? Wouldn't it be arrogance all the same to track down the positive side of such arrogance in order to take part, for the sake of this positive side, in this arrogance? Well? Wouldn't it be?

NATHAN: Al-Hafi, see to it that you get back to your desert. I'm afraid that especially among human beings you might forget how to be a human being.

DERVISH: Right, I fear that too. Farewell!

NATHAN: So hasty? But wait, Al-Hafi. Will the desert run away from you? Just wait! If only he heard me! Hey, Al-Hafi! Here! He's gone; and I would have liked so much to ask him about our Templar. Presumably he knows him.

Scene 4

Daja coming quickly. Nathan.

DAJA: Oh Nathan, Nathan!

NATHAN: Well? What is it?

DAJA: It's him again! It's him again!

NATHAN: Who, Daja? Who?

DAJA: Him! Him!

NATHAN: Him? Him? When do you not see *Him?* Oh yes, only your him is called "Him." That shouldn't be! Not even if he were an angel![14]

DAJA: He's walking again back and forth among the palms; and from time to time he breaks off dates.

NATHAN: He eats? A Templar?

[14]Nathan implies that Daja is confusing the Templar with *Him,* i.e., God.

DAJA: Why are you tormenting me? Her curious eye already saw him behind the thick palm grove, and followed him carefully. She asks you—begs you—to approach him immediately. Oh hurry! She'll wave to you from the window to let you know if he's coming nearer or going farther away. Oh hurry!

NATHAN: Like this, having just come down from a camel? Is that good form? Go, hurry to him and tell him I've returned. Mind you, it was only in my absence that the worthy man didn't want to enter my house; he wouldn't be averse to coming when the father himself has him invited. Go, tell him that I ask him, sincerely ask him . . .

DAJA: All in vain! He wouldn't come to you, since, in short, he wouldn't come to any Jew.

NATHAN: So go, at least go and stop him; at least to keep an eye on him. Go, I'll come after you soon.

[*Nathan hurries inside, and Daja outside.*]

Scene 5

Scene: A square with palm trees, under which the Knight Templar walks back and forth. A friar follows him at some distance from the side, always looking as if he wants to speak with him.

TEMPLAR: This one's not following me because he's bored! Look how he's trying to steal a glance at my hands![15] Good brother, . . . I can also call you father, can't I?

FRIAR: Just brother, just a lay brother; at your service.

TEMPLAR: Yes, good brother, if I only had something to give! By God! By God! I have nothing.

FRIAR: And yet thank you kindly! May God give you a thousand times what you would like to give. For it's the will, not the gift, that makes the giver. But I wasn't at all sent to you to ask for alms, sir.

TEMPLAR: But you were sent?

FRIAR: Yes, from the monastery.

TEMPLAR: Where I was just hoping to find a small pilgrim's meal?

FRIAR: The tables were already taken; but you should just come back with me, sir.

[15]The friar belongs to a mendicant order, that is, a congregation that relies on charity, and is thus presumably expecting alms.

TEMPLAR: What for? I've gone a long time without eating meat: but what's the difference? The dates are ripe.

FRIAR: You should beware of this fruit, sir. It's not good to eat too many; they clog the spleen; make your blood melancholic.[16]

TEMPLAR: And if I'd like to feel melancholic? But it wasn't for this warning that you were sent to me, was it?

FRIAR: Oh no. I'm supposed to find out about you; sound you out.

TEMPLAR: And you tell me that yourself?

FRIAR: Why not?

TEMPLAR: [*Aside:* A crafty brother!] Are there more like you in the monastery?

FRIAR: Don't know. I must obey, sir.

TEMPLAR: And yet you obey without much questioning?

FRIAR: Would it otherwise be obeying, sir?

TEMPLAR: [*Aside:* It's true that simplicity is always right!] But could you let me in on who wants to know me better? That it isn't you, I could swear.

FRIAR: Would that be proper? Would it be of any use to me?

TEMPLAR: To whom is it proper and of any use to be so curious? To whom?

FRIAR: To the Patriarch, I must believe. For he sent me to you.

TEMPLAR: The Patriarch? Doesn't he know the red cross on the white cloak any better than that?

FRIAR: But I recognize it!

TEMPLAR: Well, brother? Well? I am a Templar, and a prisoner. And what's more: taken prisoner at Tebnin,[17] the castle we would have gladly climbed in the final hour of the cease-fire in order to fire on Sidon;[18] and what's more: of twenty prisoners Saladin pardoned only me. Now the Patriarch knows what he needs to know—more than he needs.

[16]According to the long-popular theory of the Greek physician Galen (ca. 130–ca. 200 C.E.), an excess of black bile (Greek: *melancholia*) led to mental disorders. The Templar's reply refers to the everyday sense of melancholy as simply sad.

[17]A fortress in Lebanon, captured by Saladin in 1187.

[18]A major port city in Lebanon.

FRIAR: But hardly more than he already knows. He would also like to know why Saladin pardoned you, sir, and you alone.

TEMPLAR: Do I know that myself? My neck already bared, I kneeled on my cloak, waiting for the blow, when Saladin looked me closer in the eye, jumped closer to me and waved. I'm lifted up, unchained; want to thank him; see tears in his eyes. He's mute, so am I. He goes, I stay. How that all fits together let the Patriarch himself figure out.

FRIAR: He figures that God must have preserved you for great, great things.

TEMPLAR: Yes, for great things! To save a Jewish girl from a fire; to accompany curious pilgrims to Mount Sinai; and other such things.

FRIAR: Great things will certainly come! What you've done already is not so bad. Perhaps the Patriarch himself already has much more important business for you, sir.

TEMPLAR: So? You mean, brother. . . ? Has he already let you know what it is?

FRIAR: Oh yes indeed! I'm supposed to examine you, sir, to see if you're really the man for the job.

TEMPLAR: Alright, go ahead and examine! [*Aside:* I'd like to see how this one examines!] Well?

FRIAR: The quickest way is to reveal the Patriarch's wishes quite directly to you, sir.

TEMPLAR: Good!

FRIAR: He would like you to send a note for him, sir.

TEMPLAR: Me? I'm not a messenger. This, this is the task that's supposed to be so much more glorious than pulling a Jewish girl from the fire?

FRIAR: But it must be! For, the Patriarch says, this note is of great importance to all of Christendom. Whoever delivers this note, the Patriarch says, will be rewarded by God with a very special crown as soon as he gets to Heaven. And no one would be worthier of this crown, the Patriarch says, than you, sir.

TEMPLAR: Than I?

FRIAR: For there is hardly anyone more capable of earning this crown, the Patriarch says, than you, sir.

TEMPLAR: Than I?

FRIAR: You would be free here, could look around everywhere; you know how to storm and protect a city; you could, the Patriarch says, best judge the strengths and weaknesses of Saladin's newly built inner second wall, describe them most clearly, the Patriarch says, to the warriors of God.

TEMPLAR: Good brother, if I only knew better the contents of the note.

FRIAR: Yes that, that I don't know so well myself. But the note is to King Philip.[19] The Patriarch . . . I've often wondered how such a saint, who otherwise lives so fully in Heaven, at the same time can be bothered to be so well informed of the things of this world. It must get annoying to him.

TEMPLAR: Well then? The Patriarch?

FRIAR: Knows quite exactly, quite reliably, how and where, how strongly, from which side Saladin will open his campaign, in case the fighting starts again in earnest.

TEMPLAR: He knows that?

FRIAR: Yes, and would very much like to let King Philip know it, so that he can measure whether the danger would really be so terrible to justify restoring, cost what it will, the cease-fire with Saladin,[20] which your order so bravely violated.

TEMPLAR: What a Patriarch! Well then! The dear, brave man doesn't want me as a common messenger; he wants me as a spy. Tell your Patriarch, good brother, explaining my reasons to the best of your abilities, that this isn't to my taste. I still have to see myself as a prisoner; and the Templar's only calling is to thrust forward with the sword, not to be a spy.

FRIAR: Just as I thought! I don't really blame you, sir. But the best is yet to come. The Patriarch has also figured out the name and location in Lebanon of the stronghold where all the enormous sums of money are hidden that Saladin's careful father uses to pay the army and to defray the expenses of preparation for war. From time to time Saladin makes his way to this stronghold on remote paths, and hardly accompanied. You understand, don't you?

TEMPLAR: By no means!

FRIAR: What would be easier than to seize Saladin? To finish him off?

[19]Philip II (1165–1223), king of France and one of the leaders of the Third Crusade.
[20]A reference to the cease-fire of 1192.

You're shuddering? Oh, a few God-fearing Maronites[21] have already offered to do the deed, if only a valiant man would lead them.

TEMPLAR: And the Patriarch has chosen me as this valiant man?

FRIAR: He thinks that in this matter King Philip could best lend a hand from Ptolemais.[22]

TEMPLAR: To me? To me, brother? Me? Haven't you heard, just heard, what kind of obligation I have to Saladin?

FRIAR: Certainly I've heard.

TEMPLAR: And still?

FRIAR: Yes—the Patriarch thinks—that may be, but God and the orders . . .

TEMPLAR: Change nothing! Don't ask me to be a rogue!

FRIAR: Certainly not! Only, the Patriarch thinks, if you are a rogue to human beings you are not necessarily a rogue to God.

TEMPLAR: I owe my life to Saladin, and I should rob him of his?

FRIAR: Oh come on! But Saladin, the Patriarch thinks, still remains an enemy of Christendom and can't claim any right to be your friend.

TEMPLAR: Friend? A man to whom I just don't want to become a scoundrel, an ungrateful scoundrel?

FRIAR: Of course! Still, the Patriarch thinks, when it comes to gratitude we're even, even before God and human beings, if the action is not committed for our sake. And since it's been said, the Patriarch thinks, that Saladin only pardoned you because something in your face, in your being reminded him of his brother . . .

TEMPLAR: This the Patriarch knows as well, and still? Ah! If this were certain! Ah, Saladin! What? Nature should have put just *one* of my features in your brother's form, without this corresponding to anything in my soul? What this corresponded to, could I suppress it to please a Patriarch? Nature, you don't lie like this! Nor does God contradict himself in his work! Go, brother! Don't make me angry! Go! Go!

FRIAR: I'm going, and happier than when I came. Pardon me, sir. We monastic people are obligated to obey our superiors.

[21]Maronites were originally Syrian Christians separate from the Roman church. In the late twelfth century they joined with Rome and supported the Crusades.

[22]A city, also known as Acre or Acco, on the bay of Haifa (today Israel). It was the main stronghold of the Crusaders.

Scene 6

The Knight Templar and Daja, who for awhile has been observing the Templar from afar and now approaches him.

DAJA: It seems the friar didn't leave him in the best mood. Still I have to take my chances.

TEMPLAR: Well, splendid! Does the proverb lie: that monk and woman, and woman and monk are both the devil's claws? Today he's thrown me from the one into the other.

DAJA: What do I see? Noble knight, is it you? Thank God! A thousand thanks to God! Where have you been hiding all this time? You haven't been ill, have you?

TEMPLAR: No.

DAJA: You're healthy then?

TEMPLAR: Yes.

DAJA: We were really very concerned about you.

TEMPLAR: So?

DAJA: You must have been traveling, right?

TEMPLAR: Good guess!

DAJA: And just came back?

TEMPLAR: Yesterday.

DAJA: Recha's father also arrived today. And now may Recha hope?

TEMPLAR: For what?

DAJA: For what she has so often begged of you. Her father himself will soon beg you to come. He's returned from Babylon. With twenty heavily laden camels, and everything precious that India and Persia and Syria, even China have to offer in stones and cloths.

TEMPLAR: I'm not buying anything.

DAJA: His people worship him as a prince. But I've often been amazed that they call Nathan "the Wise" rather than "the Rich."

TEMPLAR: Perhaps rich and wise are the same thing to his people.

DAJA: Above all they should have called him "the Good." For you can't imagine how good he is. When he learned how much Recha owes you, what he wouldn't have given you, done for you at that moment!

TEMPLAR: Ah!

DAJA: Give him a try, come and see!

TEMPLAR: What? How quickly a moment passes?

DAJA: If he weren't so good, would I have agreed to stay with him for so long? Do you think I somehow don't feel my worth as a Christian? And it wasn't sung over my cradle that I would follow my husband to Palestine only to raise a Jewish girl. My dear husband was a noble knight in Emperor Frederick's army—

TEMPLAR: A Swiss by birth, who had the honor and grace to drown in a river with His Imperial Majesty.[23] Woman! How many times have you already told me that? Won't you ever stop pursuing me?

DAJA: Pursuing! Dear God!

TEMPLAR: Yes, yes, pursuing. I never want to see you again! Don't want to hear you! Don't want to be reminded again and again of a deed that I did without thinking about it; that, when I think about it, is a mystery to me. Of course I don't want to regret it. But look; if such a case happens again, it's your fault if I don't act so quickly, if I look into things first—and let burn what's burning.

DAJA: God forbid!

TEMPLAR: From now on just do me this one favor and act as if you don't know me. I beg you. And keep the father away from me too. A Jew is a Jew. I'm just an ordinary Swabian.[24] The girl's image disappeared long ago from my mind, if it was ever there in the first place.

DAJA: But yours isn't gone from hers.

TEMPLAR: So what's it doing there? What?

DAJA: Who knows! People aren't always what they appear to be.

TEMPLAR: But they're seldom any better. [*He goes.*]

DAJA: But wait! What's the hurry?

TEMPLAR: Woman, don't make me hate the palms that I normally like so much to walk under.

DAJA: Then go, you German bear! Go!—And yet I mustn't lose track of this animal. [*She follows him from a distance.*]

[23]Emperor Frederick I, "Barbarossa" (1123–1190), was a Crusade leader who drowned while on campaign.

[24]The inhabitants of Swabia, a state in southwestern Germany, had the reputation of being simple and unsophisticated.

ACT 2

Scene 1

Scene: The Sultan's palace.

Saladin and Sittah are playing chess.

SITTAH: Where are you, Saladin? How you're playing today!

SALADIN: Not well? I thought I was.

SITTAH: For me you are, but barely. Take this move back.

SALADIN: Why?

SITTAH: Your knight is unprotected.

SALADIN: That's right. Well, then!

SITTAH: Then I'll have you in a fork.

SALADIN: Right again. Check then!

SITTAH: What does that help you? I'll move here, and you're right back where you were.

SALADIN: I can see very well that I'm not getting out of this trap without paying for it. Oh well! Just take the knight.

SITTAH: I don't want it. I'll go past it.

SALADIN: You're not giving me anything. There's more for you in this plan than the knight.

SITTAH: Perhaps.

SALADIN: Don't reckon without your host. Look at this! Admit it, you wouldn't have suspected this.

SITTAH: Of course not. How could I have suspected that you were so tired of your queen?

SALADIN: Of my queen?

SITTAH: Now I see: I should win my thousand dinars[25] today, not a penny more.

SALADIN: Why?

SITTAH: You have to ask! Because you're making every effort to lose. But this isn't what I'd counted on. Besides the fact that such a game is hardly entertaining: haven't I always won the most from you when I lost? When haven't you given me twice the stakes I owed you for a lost game just to console me?

[25]A dinar was a gold coin circulating in Islamic states from the seventh century.

SALADIN: See? So when *you* have lost, you've made every effort to do so, dear sister, right?

SITTAH: At least I can say that your generosity, my dear brother, is responsible for the fact that I haven't learned to play better.

SALADIN: We're getting away from the game. Finish!

SITTAH: So it's staying this way? Well then: check! And double check!

SALADIN: Well now! I hadn't seen that with this check I'll lose my queen.

SITTAH: Could that be helped? Let's see.

SALADIN: No, no; just take the queen. I was never very happy with that piece.

SITTAH: Just with that piece?

SALADIN: Get on with it!—That doesn't hurt me. Now everything is protected again.

SITTAH: My own brother taught me how to be polite to queens. [*She leaves it standing.*]

SALADIN: Take her or don't take her! Either way I don't have her.

SITTAH: Why take her? Check!—Check!

SALADIN: Keep going.

SITTAH: Check!—and check!—and check!

SALADIN: And mate!

SITTAH: Not quite. Move the knight between these pieces, or whatever you want. It's all the same.

SALADIN: Quite right! You've won: and Al-Hafi will pay you. Have him called! Quickly! Sittah, you weren't so wrong; I wasn't so completely in the game, I was distracted. And then: who keeps giving us these smooth stones, which don't remind us of anything, don't signify anything? Was I playing with the Imam?[26] Oh, well. Loss calls for an excuse. It's not the formless pieces, Sittah, that made me lose: it's your skill, your calm and quick glance . . .

SITTAH: Nor will this soothe the sting of losing. Enough, you were distracted; and more than I.

SALADIN: Than you? What would have distracted *you*?

[26]The Imam was a leader of the Muslim community. The "smooth stones, which don't remind us of anything," are a reference to the Islamic prohibition on producing images or figures that might encourage idolatry.

SITTAH: Certainly not your distraction!—Oh Saladin, when will we play like this again?

SALADIN: We'll play harder than ever! Ah! Because it's starting again, you mean? Perhaps! Well, let it! I wasn't the one who drew the first sword. I would have happily extended the cease-fire again; would have happily found a good husband for my Sittah at the same time. And that would have been Richard's brother: yes, Richard's brother.[27]

SITTAH: How you love to praise your Richard!

SALADIN: If only our brother Melek had married Richard's sister.[28] Oh! What a house we'd have! Oh! The best house in the world, the best of the best! You know I'm not lazy about praising myself. I consider myself worthy of my friends. But *that* would have produced human beings!

SITTAH: Didn't I laugh at these beautiful dreams? You don't know the Christians, don't want to know them. Their pride is to be Christians, not human beings. For even those things that their Founder gave them, those things that season superstition with humanity, they don't love because they are humane, but because Christ taught them, because Christ did them. Lucky for them he was such a good person. Lucky for them they can take his virtue on trust and faith! But what virtue? Not his virtue. His name has to be spread everywhere, has to slander and swallow up the names of all good people. For them it's all about the name, only the name.

SALADIN: You mean: why they still demand that you and Melek be called Christians before you're allowed to love Christians?

SITTAH: Exactly! As though only Christians, as Christians, should be able to make use of the love that the Creator gave man and woman!

SALADIN: The Christians believe such pathetic things that they might as well believe this too! But still you're mistaken. It's the Templars, not the Christians, who are to blame. They're not to blame as Christians, but as Templars. Its because of them alone that nothing became of the plan. They simply don't want to give up Acre,[29]

[27]The reference is to Richard I (1157–1199), better known as Richard the Lion-Hearted, and his brother, Prince John (1167–1216), the future King John I of England. There is no historical evidence of a marriage plan for John and Sittah.

[28]Richard did propose a marriage alliance between his sister Joanna and Saladin's brother Melek and their joint rule over Jerusalem, but the Church rejected the plan.

[29]See note 22.

which Richard's sister was going to give our brother Melek as a dowry. To keep the knights' advantage they're playing the monk, the silly monk. And in case they might succeed in striking, they could hardly wait for the cease-fire to end. Funny! Keep it up, sirs, keep it up! Fine with me! If only everything else were as it should be.

SITTAH: Well? What else is bothering you? What else could have upset you?

SALADIN: What's always upset me. I've been to Lebanon, to see our father. He's still overwhelmed with worries.

SITTAH: Oh dear!

SALADIN: He can't make it. He's pinched everywhere. He's short here, short there.

SITTAH: Short of what? What's he missing?

SALADIN: What else but what I hardly think worth naming? The thing that, when I have it, seems so redundant, and when I don't have it, seems so indispensable. What's taking Al-Hafi so long? Is nobody looking for him? Confounded, cursed money! Thank goodness you're here, Hafi.

Scene 2

The Dervish Al-Hafi, Saladin, and Sittah.

AL-HAFI: I suppose the money from Egypt has arrived. Hopefully there's plenty of it.

SALADIN: Do you have any news?

AL-HAFI: Me? Not me. I thought I would get it here.

SALADIN: Give Sittah a thousand dinars. [*In his thoughts going back and forth.*]

AL-HAFI: Give! Instead of get! Oh great! That's even worse than getting nothing. To Sittah? To Sittah again? You've lost? You've lost at chess again? The game's still standing!

SITTAH: You'll grant me my good luck, won't you?

AL-HAFI: [*Looking at the game.*] Grant, what? When—you know well.

SITTAH: [*Waving at him.*] Sh! Hafi! Sh!

AL-HAFI: [*Still looking at the game.*] Grant it to yourself first!

SITTAH: Al-Hafi, sh!

AL-HAFI: [*To Sittah.*] You were white? You have him in check?

SITTAH: Good thing he can't hear us.

AL-HAFI: Now it's his move?

SITTAH: [*Coming closer to him.*] So do I get my money?

AL-HAFI: [*Still fixed on the game.*] Oh yes. You'll get it, just like you always do.

SITTAH: What? Are you mad?

AL-HAFI: The game isn't over. You haven't lost, Saladin.

SALADIN: [*Hardly listening.*] Well? Well? Pay! Pay!

AL-HAFI: Pay! Pay! There's your queen.

SALADIN: [*Still hardly listening.*] Doesn't count. Doesn't belong to the game anymore.

SITTAH: Just do it, and see to it that I can pick up my money.

AL-HAFI: [*Still absorbed in the game.*] Of course, just like always. Even so, even if the queen doesn't count, you're still not in mate.

SALADIN: [*Steps up and throws the game over.*] I am, I want to be.

AL-HAFI: Alright! The stakes are as legitimate as the game. They're both a farce!

SALADIN: [*To Sittah.*] What is he saying? What?

SITTAH: [*From time to time waving at Al-Hafi.*] You know him. He likes to be stubborn, likes to be asked. He must also be a little jealous.

SALADIN: But not of you. Of my sister? What do I hear, Hafi? Jealous? You?

AL-HAFI: Maybe! Maybe! I wish I had her brain, wish I were as good as she is.

SITTAH: Even so, he still hasn't paid me. And he'll pay me today. Just let him go! Just go, Al-Hafi, go! I want to be able to send for my money.

AL-HAFI: No. I can't play this game anymore. He has to know once and for all.

SALADIN: Who? And what?

SITTAH: Al-Hafi! Is this your promise? Is this how you keep your word?

AL-HAFI: How could I know it would go this far?

SALADIN: Well? Am I going to learn something?

SITTAH: I beg you, Al-Hafi. Be reasonable.

SALADIN: This is very strange! What could Sittah so solemnly, so cordially ask of a stranger, of a dervish, that she couldn't ask of me, her own brother. Al-Hafi, now I order you. Speak, dervish!

SITTAH: My brother, don't let a trifle come closer to you than it deserves to. You know, I've won the same amount from you in chess many times. And since I don't need the money now, and since the money in Al-Hafi's treasury isn't exactly piled up, the payments have been left where they are. But don't worry! I'm not going to give them to you, or Al-Hafi, or the treasury.

AL-HAFI: If it were only that! That!

SITTAH: And more of the same. What you once set aside for me has also stayed in the treasury for a few months.

AL-HAFI: Still not everything.

SALADIN: Not yet? Will you talk?

AL-HAFI: While we've been waiting for the money from Egypt, she's . . .

SITTAH: [*To Saladin.*] Why listen to him?

AL-HAFI: . . . not only taken nothing . . .

SALADIN: Good girl! And advances too, right?

AL-HAFI: She's kept the whole court going, fought your expenses all by herself.

SALADIN: Ha! That, that's my sister! [*hugging her*]

SITTAH: Who else could have made me rich enough to do this but you, my brother?

AL-HAFI: She'll soon make herself as poor as a beggar, just like her brother.

SALADIN: Me, poor? Her brother poor? When have I had more, when have I had less? One suit, one sword, one horse—and one God! What more do I need? When would I be lacking those? And yet, Al-Hafi, I could scold you.

SITTAH: Don't scold, my brother. If only I could ease the burdens of our father as well.

SALADIN: Oh! Oh! Now you've beaten my happiness down again! I'm not lacking anything, nor can I. But he's lacking, and therefore we're all lacking. Tell me, what should I do? There still might not be anything coming from Egypt for a long time. Why that is, God knows. Everything there is still calm. I'm happy to endure deprivation, reductions, saving when it only affects me, but only when it

affects me and no one else. But what can that help? I must have one horse, one suit, one sword. And my God is also not negotiable. He's satisfied with so little. With my heart. But I had really counted on the surplus from your treasury, Hafi.

AL-HAFI: Surplus? Tell me yourself whether you wouldn't have had me impaled, or at least strangled, if I had been in possession of a surplus of yours. I'd rather risk embezzlement!

SALADIN: Well then, what should we do? Can't you borrow from anyone else but Sittah?

SITTAH: Would I have allowed this privilege to be taken from me, brother? And by him? Even now I insist on it. I'm not totally broke yet.

SALADIN: Only not totally! That takes the cake. Go immediately, make arrangements, Hafi. Take from whomever you can, and however you can! Go, borrow, promise. Only don't borrow from those whom I've made rich, Hafi. For borrowing from them would be the same thing as asking them to repay me. Go to the stingiest. They'll be happiest to lend to me. Since they know how well their money appreciates in my hands.

AL-HAFI: I don't know anyone like that.

SITTAH: It occurs to me, Hafi, that I've heard your friend is back.

AL-HAFI: [*Concerned.*] Friend? My friend? Who would that be?

SITTAH: Your highly praised Jew.

AL-HAFI: Praised Jew? Highly, from me?

SITTAH: To whom God—I think I remember correctly your having described him in this way—to whom his God gave, of all the goods in this world, the smallest and the greatest in full measure.

AL-HAFI: Did I say that? What did I mean by that?

SITTAH: The smallest: wealth. And the greatest: wisdom.

AL-HAFI: What? About a Jew? I said that about a Jew?

SITTAH: Didn't you say that about your Nathan?

AL-HAFI: Oh yes! About him! About Nathan! I hadn't thought about him. Really? He's finally come home? Oh! Then things might not be so bad with him after all. Right: his people have called him "the wise," and also "the rich."

SITTAH: They call him "the rich" more now than ever. The whole city's buzzing about the precious things, the treasures he brought back.

AL-HAFI: Well, then he's "the rich" again. So he must be "the wise" again too.

SITTAH: What if you were to approach him, Hafi?

AL-HAFI: And do what with him? Certainly not borrow? Don't you know him? Nathan, lend money? His wisdom is just that, that he doesn't lend to anyone.

SITTAH: In the past you've painted a very different picture of him.

AL-HAFI: If necessary he'll lend goods. But money, money? Never money. It's true he's the kind of Jew you don't see very often. He's reasonable. He knows how to live. He's a good chess player. But he's different from all other Jews in his bad features no less than in his good ones. Just don't count on him. He gives to the poor, and perhaps as much as Saladin. If not quite as much, at least just as gladly. But completely without distinction. Jew and Christian and Muslim and Parsi,[30] they're all the same to him.

SITTAH: And such a man . . .

SALADIN: How is it that I've never heard of this man?

SITTAH: He wouldn't lend to Saladin? Not to Saladin, who would only use the money for others, not himself?

AL-HAFI: Now you're only seeing the Jew again, the really common Jew! But believe me! He is so envious of your generosity, so envious! He'd like to keep every "may God reward you" that's said in the world for himself! It's only for that reason that he doesn't lend, so he always has something to give. Because his law commands charity but not compliance, charity makes him one of the most uncompliant people in the world. Of course, for some time I haven't been on such good terms with him. But don't think that for this reason I wouldn't give him his due. He's good for everything, but not for that. Just really not for that. Now I'm about to go. I'll knock on other doors. It occurs to me that I know a Moor[31] who is rich and stingy. I'm going, I'm going.

SITTAH: What's the hurry, Hafi?

SALADIN: Let him go! Let him go!

[30]Parsis were Zoroastrians, or adherents to the religion of the ancient Persian prophet Zoroaster (628–551 B.C.E.), who lived principally in and around Bombay, India.

[31]The term "Moor" (Ger: *Mohr*) was imprecise. Originally used to identify people from northwest Africa (e.g., Mauritania and Morocco), by Lessing's time it had come to refer also to black Africans, Muslim or otherwise.

Scene 3

Sittah and Saladin.

SITTAH: But he's hurrying as if he'd like to get away from me! What does that mean? Has he really been deceived, or—is he hoping to deceive us?

SALADIN: What? You're asking me? I hardly know whom you were speaking about; and just heard about your Jew, your Nathan, for the first time today.

SITTAH: Is it possible? That a man could stay so hidden from you, a man about whom it is said that he has explored Solomon's and David's tombs and knows how to loosen their seals with a powerful secret word?[32] From them, it is said, he occasionally brings to light such immeasurable treasures that no other source could produce.

SALADIN: If this man's riches came from tombs, they certainly weren't David's or Solomon's. Fools are buried there!

SITTAH: Or scoundrels! In any case his source of riches is far more abundant, far more inexhaustible than such a tomb filled with Mammon.[33]

SALADIN: Because he's a businessman, as I've heard.

SITTAH: His beasts of burden push through every street, pull through every desert. His ships lie in every harbor. Al-Hafi himself told me that already. And he was full of delight when he added how greatly, how nobly this friend of his made use of what he wasn't too proud to earn. And he added how free from prejudice his mind was, how open his heart was to every virtue, how harmonious it was with everything beautiful.

SALADIN: And yet Hafi just spoke so uncertainly, so coldly of him.

SITTAH: Not coldly, really. He was ill at ease, as though he considered it dangerous to praise him and yet didn't want to rebuke him undeservedly. Or could it really be that even the best of a people cannot completely escape his people, that for this reason Al-Hafi really had something to be ashamed of in his friend? Be that as it may! Whether the Jew is more or less the Jew, he's rich: that's enough for us!

[32]According to legend, Solomon had entombed his father, David, with a vast treasure, which could be summoned by a magic word.

[33]That is, wealth, lucre.

SALADIN: You don't want to take his wealth by force, do you, sister?

SITTAH: Well, what do you mean by force? With fire and sword? No, no, what force do you need against the weak but their own weakness? For now just come with me to my harem and listen to a singer I just bought yesterday. In the meantime a plan might ripen in my mind for this Nathan. Come!

Scene 4

Scene: In front of Nathan's house, adjacent to the palms.

Recha and Nathan come out. Daja comes toward them.

RECHA: You've lingered a long time, my father. I'm sure he's no longer there.

NATHAN: Now, now. If he's no longer here under the palms, he'll be somewhere else. Just stay calm now. Look! Isn't that Daja coming toward us?

RECHA: She's definitely lost track of him.

NATHAN: I don't think so.

RECHA: Otherwise she'd come more quickly.

NATHAN: But she hasn't seen us yet.

RECHA: Now she sees us.

NATHAN: And is walking twice as fast. See? Just stay calm! Calm!

RECHA: Would you really want a daughter who could be calm here? Who would let herself be unconcerned for the one whose good deed saved her life? Her life, which is only so dear, because she has you to thank for it?

NATHAN: I wouldn't want you any different than you are: even if I knew that something completely different was stirring in your soul.

RECHA: What, my father?

NATHAN: You're asking me? So timidly? Whatever is going on inside you is nature and innocence. Don't worry about it. Myself, I'm not worried. Only promise me: should your heart make itself more audibly clear, don't hide its wishes from me.

RECHA: Just the thought of my heart veiling itself from you makes me shudder.

NATHAN: No more of this! The matter is settled once and for all. Here comes Daja. Well?

DAJA: He's still wandering here under the palms, and will soon come around that wall. See, there he is!

RECHA: Ah! And seems undecided on where to go, whether further, or down, or right, or left.

DAJA: No, no. He's made his way around the monastery many times before, and has to come by here, don't you think?

RECHA: Right! Right! Have you spoken to him yet? And how is he today?

DAJA: As always.

NATHAN: Just see to it that he doesn't notice you here. Step back more. Better still, go all the way inside.

RECHA: Just one more look! Ah! The hedge that steals him from me.

DAJA: Come! Come! Father is quite right. You run the risk, if he sees you, that he'll turn around on the spot.

RECHA: Ah! The hedge!

NATHAN: And just as soon as he's stepped out from behind it, he won't be able to help seeing you. So just go!

DAJA: Come! Come! I know a window we can watch them from.

RECHA: Really? [*Both go inside.*]

Scene 5

Nathan and soon thereafter the Knight Templar.

NATHAN: This strange person almost frightens me. His raw virtue almost startles me. How one human being can make another so ill at ease! Ha! He's coming! By God! The youngster looks like a man. How I like his good, defiant look, his sturdy walk. The shell might be bitter; the core certainly isn't. But where have I seen someone like him before?—Excuse me, noble Frank . . .

TEMPLAR: What?

NATHAN: May I . . .

TEMPLAR: What, Jew? What?

NATHAN: . . . dare to speak to you.

TEMPLAR: Can I help it? Just make it quick.

NATHAN: Wait, and don't rush away so proudly, so contemptuously from a man to whom you have bound yourself forever.

TEMPLAR: What's that? Ah, I can almost guess. No? You're . . .

NATHAN: My name is Nathan. I'm the father of the girl your generosity saved from the fire, and have come . . .

TEMPLAR: If it's to thank me, save it! I've already had to endure far too much thanks for this trifle. And you owe me absolutely nothing. Did I know then that this girl was your daughter? It's the Templars' duty to jump to the aid of the first person they see in need. On top of that, at that moment my life was a burden to me. I was happy, very happy for the chance to risk it for another life: for another one—even if it was only the life of a Jewess.

NATHAN: Great! Great and horrible! But this turn of phrase is quite understandable. Modest greatness takes refuge behind the horrible to avoid admiration. But when it disdains the offer of admiration: then what kind of offering does it disdain less? Knight, if you weren't a foreigner and a prisoner, I wouldn't ask you so brazenly. Tell me, order me: how can I serve you?

TEMPLAR: You? With nothing.

NATHAN: I'm a rich man.

TEMPLAR: To me the rich Jew has never been the better Jew.

NATHAN: But despite that, wouldn't you prefer to make use of the better things he has? To make use of his wealth?

TEMPLAR: Fine then, I wouldn't deny that. For the sake of my cloak I wouldn't. As soon as it's completely worn out, when neither the stitches nor the cloth will hold any longer, I'll come and borrow from you, cloth or money, so I can get a new one. Now don't look so gloomy! You're still safe. It hasn't gotten that far yet. You see, it's still in pretty good shape. Only this one corner has a nasty stain. It's singed. And that happened when I carried your daughter through the fire.

NATHAN: [*Reaching for the corner and looking closely at it.*] But it's strange that such a bad stain, that such a brand could bear better witness than his own mouth. I could kiss it, that stain! Oh, pardon me! I didn't mean to do that.

TEMPLAR: What?

NATHAN: A tear fell on it.

TEMPLAR: It's nothing! It's seen plenty of drops. [*Aside:* This Jew is starting to confuse me.]

NATHAN: Would you be so good as to send your cloak just once to my girl?

TEMPLAR: What for?

NATHAN: So that her mouth could also press against this stain. Since the desire to embrace you around the knees has been in vain.

TEMPLAR: But, Jew—Your name is Nathan? But, Nathan—Your words are very—very good—very fine—I'm embarrassed—All the same—I would . . .

NATHAN: Pretend and feign all you like. I can see through you. You were too good, too decent to be polite. The girl, all feeling; the female envoy, all eagerness; the father far away. You took care of their reputations, fled their temptation; fled, in order not to conquer. For that too I thank you.

TEMPLAR: I have to confess, you know, how Templars are supposed to think.

NATHAN: Only Templars? Only "supposed to"? And just because the rules of the order command them to? I know how good human beings think; know that there are good human beings in all lands.

TEMPLAR: With differences, though, hopefully?

NATHAN: Certainly. Differences in color and clothing, in form.

TEMPLAR: And more or less depending on where you are.

NATHAN: These differences don't mean much. The great man needs a lot of room wherever he is. And when many of them are planted too closely together, they simply break each other's branches. But ordinary men like us always put up with crowds. Only the one mustn't carp at the others. The branch has to deal nicely with the swelling growths, and the treetop mustn't consider itself the only thing that came out of the ground.

TEMPLAR: Very well said! But you know the people that first started all this carping? Do you know, Nathan, which people first called itself the Chosen People? Well? And if I now don't hate these people but still can't help having contempt for them because of their pride? Their pride, which they left behind to the Christians and Muslims, in believing that only their God is the true God. You're startled that I, a Christian, a Templar, am talking this way? When and where has the frenzy of claiming possession of the better God, of forcing this better God upon the whole world for its own good, shown itself in a

more dismal form than here and now? Who here and now hasn't had the scales fall from his eyes . . . But be blind if you like! Forget what I said and leave me alone! [*Wants to go.*]

NATHAN: Ha! You don't know how much closer this makes me want to come to you. Come, we must, must be friends! Disdain my people as much as you like. Neither of us has chosen his people. Are we our people? What does "people" mean? Are Christians and Jews more Christians and Jews than human beings? Ah! Could it be that I've found in you another person for whom it's enough to be called a human being?

TEMPLAR: Yes, by God, you've found him, Nathan! You have! Your hand! I'm ashamed that I misjudged you for a moment.

NATHAN: And I'm proud of it. Only the common is rarely misjudged.

TEMPLAR: And rare things are hard to forget. Nathan, yes, we must, must become friends.

NATHAN: Are already. How happy my Recha will be! And ah! What a happy future is opening up before my eyes! Wait 'til you get to know her.

TEMPLAR: I'm burning with longing. Who's that running out of your house? Isn't it your Daja?

NATHAN: Absolutely. So fearful?

TEMPLAR: Has something happened to our Recha?

Scene 6

Daja, hurrying, and the previous.

DAJA: Nathan! Nathan!

NATHAN: Well?

DAJA: Pardon me, noble knight, for having to interrupt you.

NATHAN: Well, what is it?

TEMPLAR: What is it?

DAJA: The Sultan has sent a message. The Sultan wants to speak to you. God, the Sultan!

NATHAN: Me? The Sultan? He must be curious to see what new things I've brought back. Just say a little or nothing at all has been unpacked.

DAJA: No, no. He doesn't want to see anything, just wants to speak to you, you, in person, and soon, as soon as you can.

NATHAN: I'll come. Just go on, then, go!

DAJA: Beg your pardon, noble knight. God, we're so worried about what the Sultan wants.

NATHAN: We'll see soon enough. Go now, go!

Scene 7

Nathan and the Templar.

TEMPLAR: So you don't know him yet—I mean, personally?

NATHAN: Saladin? Not yet. I haven't avoided him, but also haven't tried to meet him. His general reputation was far too good for me not to prefer believing to seeing. But now, in this case, he has, by sparing your life . . .

TEMPLAR: Yes. It is definitely justified. The life I live is his gift.

NATHAN: From which he has doubly, triply given me life. This has changed everything between us. It has suddenly thrown a rope around me that will forever bind me in his service. I can hardly wait to see what he'll command me to do first. I'm ready for anything, and ready, thanks to you, to confess that I am.

TEMPLAR: I still haven't had the chance to thank him myself, though I've crossed his path so many times. The impression I made on him came so quickly, as quickly as it disappeared. Who knows if he even remembers me? And yet he must at least once remember me to decide my fate completely. It's not enough that I still exist by his order, that I'm still alive *thanks to* his will. Now I must wait for him to tell me according to *whose* will I have to live.

NATHAN: Exactly. All the more reason for me not to delay. There might be an occasion for me to bring that up during the conversation. Allow me, pardon me—I'm in a hurry—But when, when will we see you at our house?

TEMPLAR: As soon as I may.

NATHAN: As soon as you'd like.

TEMPLAR: Today.

NATHAN: And your name? I have to ask.

TEMPLAR: My name was—is—Curd von Stauffen. Curd!

NATHAN: Von Stauffen? Stauffen? Stauffen?

TEMPLAR: Why does that stand out for you?

NATHAN: Von Stauffen? There are many in that family . . .

TEMPLAR: Oh yes! Here there were, here many of the family lie rotting. My uncle himself—or my father, I should say—but why are you looking more and more sharply at me?

NATHAN: Oh nothing! Oh nothing! How could I tire of seeing you?

TEMPLAR: Then I'll leave you first. The curious person's look has often found more than it wished to find. I'm afraid of it, Nathan. Let time, not curiosity, gradually make our acquaintance. [*He leaves.*]

NATHAN: [*Watching him, astonished.*] "The curious person's look has often found more than it wished to find." It's as if he could read into my soul! Yes, truly. That could also happen to me. Not only Wolf's build, Wolf's walk: his voice too. Wolf even tossed his head just like that, absolutely just like that. Wolf even carried his sword just like that, and at the same time stroked his eyebrows with his hand to hide the fire of his gaze. How such deeply imprinted images can sometimes sleep within us, until a word, a sound awakens them. Von Stauffen! Quite right, quite right. Filnek and Stauffen. I want to know more soon, soon. But first to Saladin. But what's that? Isn't that Daja lurking there? Now just come closer, Daja.

Scene 8

Daja and Nathan.

NATHAN: Now I'm sure both of you are burning to learn something very different from what Saladin wants from me.

DAJA: Can you blame her? You just started speaking so intimately with him when the Sultan's message shooed us away from the window.

NATHAN: Well then, just tell her she can expect him any minute.

DAJA: Really? Really?

NATHAN: But can I really count on you, Daja? Be on your guard, I beg you. You won't regret it. And your conscience itself will tell you it's right. Just don't spoil anything in my plan. Just speak and ask modestly, with restraint.

DAJA: That you could still remember such a thing! I'm going. You go yourself. Look! I think a second messenger of the Sultan is coming, Al-Hafi, your dervish. [*Exit.*]

Scene 9

Nathan and Al-Hafi.

AL-HAFI: Hey! Hey! I was just about to come and see you.

NATHAN: Is it so urgent? What's he demanding of me?

AL-HAFI: Who?

NATHAN: Saladin. I'm coming, I'm coming.

AL-HAFI: To whom? To Saladin?

NATHAN: Didn't Saladin send you?

AL-HAFI: Me? No. Has he sent for you?

NATHAN: Yes, he certainly has.

AL-HAFI: Well, it's a good thing.

NATHAN: What? What's a good thing?

AL-HAFI: That . . . it's not my fault. God knows, it's not my fault. What I haven't said, what lies I haven't told, to prevent it!

NATHAN: To prevent what? What's a good thing?

AL-HAFI: That now you've become his defterdar. I feel sorry for you. But I don't want to witness it. I'm going now. I'm going. You've already heard where, and know the way. Tell me if you have anything to order from there. I'm at your service. Of course it can't be anything more than what a ragged man can carry. I'm going, so tell me soon.

NATHAN: Think about it, Al-Hafi. Think about the fact that I don't know anything about this. What are you chattering about?

AL-HAFI: You're bringing the purse with you right away?

NATHAN: Purse?

AL-HAFI: Well, the money that you're supposed to lend Saladin.

NATHAN: And there's nothing else?

AL-HAFI: I'm supposed to witness him hollow you out every day down to your toes? Supposed to watch while extravagance from the otherwise never empty barns of temperance borrows, and borrows, and borrows until the poor mice inside starve? Do you flatter yourself that the one who needs your money will also follow your advice? Right, imagine him following advice! When has Saladin ever let himself be advised? Just think, Nathan, what just now happened to me with him.

NATHAN: Well?

AL-HAFI: There I come to him, just after he's played chess with his sister. Sittah doesn't play too badly. And the game that Saladin thought was lost and had already given up is still standing there. And I see that the game is far from lost.

NATHAN: Wow! That was a great find for you!

AL-HAFI: He only had to protect his king with his pawn to get out of check. If only I could show you!

NATHAN: Oh, I trust you!

AL-HAFI: Because then his rook would have been free to move, and she would have been done for. And I want to show him all this and call him. Imagine!

NATHAN: He disagrees with you?

AL-HAFI: He doesn't even listen to me, and contemptuously throws the whole game into a heap.

NATHAN: Is that possible?

AL-HAFI: And says he wants to be in mate once and for all. He wants to be! Is that playing?

NATHAN: Hardly, more like playing with playing.

AL-HAFI: All the same it didn't count for anything.

NATHAN: Never mind the money! That's the least of it. But not even listening to you! Not even listening to you about a point of such importance! Not admiring your eagle eye! That, that calls for revenge, doesn't it?

AL-HAFI: Oh, never mind. I tell you this only so you can see what kind of head he has. In short, I, I can't stand being with him anymore. So now I have to run to every dirty Moor and ask who wants to lend to him. I, who have never begged for myself, am now supposed to borrow for others. Borrowing isn't much better than begging, just as lending, lending at usury, isn't much better than stealing. Among my Guebres[34] on the Ganges I don't need either one, and don't need to be the tool of either one. On the Ganges, only on the Ganges are there human beings. Here you're the only

[34]Guebres were Zoroastrians. See note 30. The unlikely fact of a dervish, that is, a Muslim, referring to Guebres or Zoroastrians as "his" can be attributed either to Lessing's confusion over the different religions or to a deliberate attempt on his part to show the malleability and compatibility of differing religious traditions.

one who deserves to live on the Ganges. Will you come with me? Leave him in the lurch with his plunder once and for all. He's going to take it from you bit by bit anyway. This way you can end the unpleasant job at once. I'll get you a Delk.[35] Come! Come!

NATHAN: I would think we could always do that. But, Al-Hafi, I'll think it over. Wait . . .

AL-HAFI: Think it over? No, something like this you don't think over.

NATHAN: Just 'til I come back from the Sultan, 'til I take leave . . .

AL-HAFI: Whoever thinks it over is looking for reasons not to be able to do it. Whoever can't decide on a moment's notice to live for himself will be a slave to others forever. As you like it! Farewell! As you please. My way is there, yours is here.

NATHAN: Al-Hafi! You don't even want to settle your accounts?

AL-HAFI: What a joke! The holdings in my bank aren't worth counting. And you or Sittah can vouch for my debts. Farewell! [*Exit.*]

NATHAN: [*Watching him.*] I'll vouch for it! Wild, good, noble, what should I call him? The true beggar is the one and only true king! [*Exit from another side.*]

ACT 3

Scene 1

Scene: In Nathan's house.

Recha and Daja.

RECHA: Daja, how did my father express himself? "I can expect him at any moment"? That sounds—doesn't it—as though he would appear so soon. But how many moments have already passed! Oh well: who thinks about the past? I only want to live in each new moment. And the one that brings him will eventually come.

DAJA: Oh, that cursed message from the Sultan! Without it Nathan would have brought him here right away.

RECHA: And if he came now, at this moment, if my warmest, most heartfelt wishes were fulfilled, then what? Then what?

[35]In a letter to his brother Karl, Lessing wrote that a Delk was "in Arabic the name of a dervish's smock." Karl Lachmann and Franz Muncker, eds., *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 18 (Leipzig, 1907), 313.

DAJA: Then what? Then I hope that my warmest wishes would also be fulfilled.

RECHA: What will then take its place in my chest, which without a ruling wish of wishes, has forgotten how to swell? Nothing? Oh, I'm afraid!

DAJA: My wish, mine will then take its place. Mine. My wish to see you in Europe, to know you are in hands that are worthy of you.

RECHA: You're wrong. What makes this wish yours is exactly what prevents it from ever becoming mine. You're drawn to your people. And mine? Mine shouldn't keep me? An image of your people that hasn't dissolved in your soul should be worth more than the one I can see, and touch, and hear—my people?

DAJA: Resist all you want! The ways of heaven are the ways of heaven. And if your savior himself, through whom his God, for whom he fights, should wish to lead you into the land and to the people for which you were born?

RECHA: Daja! There you go again, dear Daja! You really have peculiar ideas! "His, his God! for whom he fights!" Who owns God? What kind of God is it that human beings could own, that has to be fought for by human beings? And how do you know what clod of earth you're born *for* if it's not for the one that you were born *on*? If only my father heard you like this! What did he do to you to make you always pretend that my happiness is as far away from him as possible? What did he do to you to make you so happy to mix the seeds of reason, which he sowed so purely in my soul, with the weeds or flowers of your land? Dear, dear Daja, he doesn't want your colorful flowers on my soil! And I have to say to you, when they cover my soil it strikes me as sapped, ravaged by your flowers. To me their scents are bittersweet; they make me so numb, so dizzy! Your brain is more used to them. I don't blame you for having strong enough nerves to handle them. It's just that they're not my taste. And your angel, how close did he come to making a fool out of me? I'm still ashamed to look at my father after that farce!

DAJA: Farce! As if reason were only at home here! Farce! Farce! If only I could speak!

RECHA: Can't you? When wasn't I all ears, whenever you felt like entertaining me with your stories about the heroes of the faith? Haven't I always been happy to show my admiration for their deeds and to cry over their sufferings? It's true that their faith never

seemed to me to be their most heroic feature. I found more comforting their teaching that submission to God is entirely independent of our speculations about God. Dear Daja, my father has said that so many times and you yourself have agreed with him so often on that point. Why are you destroying by yourself what you built together with him? Dear Daja, this isn't the kind of conversation we should greet our friend with. Of course, it's fine with me, since the most important thing for me is to know if he . . . Listen, Daja! Isn't someone coming to our door? I hope it's him! Listen!

Scene 2

Recha, Daja, and the Templar, for whom someone outside is holding the door and saying:

Go inside here!

RECHA: [*Nearly collides with the Templar, pulls herself together, and is about to fall to his feet.*]

TEMPLAR: I came late simply to avoid this. And yet—

RECHA: I only want to thank God at the feet of this proud man. I don't want to thank the man. He doesn't want any thanks. He wants it as little as the water bucket that proved to be so useful at dousing. It let itself be filled, let itself be emptied, nothing to me, nothing to you. The man is the same way. He too was only shoved into the fire. Then I happened to fall into his arms. There I happened to stay, like a spark on his cloak, in his arms. Until something, I don't know what, shoved us both out of the fire. What's there to thank? In Europe wine drives people to much greater deeds. Templars, they just have to behave this way. They have to be somewhat better trained dogs to fetch from the fire as well as the water.

TEMPLAR: [*Looking at her with astonishment and uneasiness.*] Oh Daja, Daja! If in moments of worry and anger my mood was rude to you, why bring every foolishness that seized my tongue back to her? Your vengeance was too cruel, Daja! If you'd please represent me to her more fairly from now on.

DAJA: I don't think, knight, I don't think these little barbs that she threw at your heart have hurt you much.

RECHA: What? You had worries? And were stingier with your worries than with your life?

TEMPLAR: Good, sweet child! How my soul is divided between eye and ear. This wasn't the girl, no, no, this wasn't the girl I pulled out of the fire. For who could have known her and not pulled her out of the fire? Who would have waited for me? Yet—fear—distorts. [*Pause during which he seems to lose himself in contemplation of her.*]

RECHA: But I find you the same as you were. [*Another pause; until she continues, trying to interrupt his staring.*] Now, knight, tell us then where you've been so long? I could almost ask: where are you now?

TEMPLAR: I am—where maybe I shouldn't be.

RECHA: Where you were? Also maybe where you shouldn't have been? That's not good.

TEMPLAR: On—on—what's the mountain called? On Mount Sinai.

RECHA: On Mount Sinai? How nice! Now I can finally learn for sure whether it's true . . .

TEMPLAR: What? What? Whether it's true that you can still see the place where Moses stood before God when . . .

RECHA: No, no, not that. Wherever he stood, he was standing before God. And I'm familiar enough with all that. I'd like to learn from you whether it isn't nearly as hard to climb up this mountain as down. You see, every time I've climbed a mountain it's been the opposite. Well, knight? What? You're turning away from me? Don't want to see me?

TEMPLAR: Because I want to hear you.

RECHA: Because you don't want to show me that you're smiling at my simplemindedness? That you're smiling at how I couldn't ask anything more important about this holiest of all mountains? Isn't that right?

TEMPLAR: Still I have to look you in the eye again. What? Now you're casting your eyes down? Now you're holding back your smile at how I first want to read in facial expressions, in doubtful facial expressions, what I hear so clearly, what you say so distinctly. You're holding it back? Ah Recha! Recha! How right he was when he said, "Get to know her first!"

RECHA: Who said that to you? And about whom?

TEMPLAR: "Get to know her first!" Your father said that to me, about you.

DAJA: And didn't I say the same thing? Didn't I?

TEMPLAR: Only where is he? Where is your father? Is he still at the Sultan's?

RECHA: Without a doubt.

TEMPLAR: Still, still there? Oh, I'm so forgetful! No, no; he couldn't be there anymore. He's probably waiting for me down there by the monastery. Definitely. I mean, that was what we planned. Excuse me! I'm going, I'll get him . . .

DAJA: That's my job. Stay, knight, stay. I'll bring him right away.

TEMPLAR: Not like that, not like that! He's expecting me, not you. Besides, he could easily . . . who knows? With the Sultan he could easily . . . You don't know the Sultan! . . . easily get into difficulties. Believe me, there could be danger if I don't go.

RECHA: Danger? What kind of danger?

TEMPLAR: Danger for me, for you, for him: if I don't go quickly, quickly. [*Exit.*]

Scene 3

Recha and Daja.

RECHA: What's this, Daja? So quickly? What's the matter with him? What struck him? What's stalking him?

DAJA: Just leave him alone. I think it's not a bad sign.

RECHA: Sign? Of what?

DAJA: That something's happening inside. It's boiling, and shouldn't boil over. Just leave him alone. Now it's up to you.

RECHA: What's up to me? You're becoming, like him, incomprehensible to me.

DAJA: Soon you'll be able to pay him back for all the trouble he's caused you. But don't be all too severe, don't be all too vengeful.

RECHA: What you're talking about only you know.

DAJA: You're so calm again all of a sudden?

RECHA: I am, yes I am . . .

DAJA: At least admit that his uneasiness makes you happy, that it's thanks to his uneasiness that you feel at ease.

RECHA: I'm completely unaware of this! The most I could admit to you

would be that it's strange to me how such calm could suddenly follow such a storm in my heart. His full appearance, his speech, his tone . . .

DAJA: Sated you?

RECHA: I wouldn't say sated me. No, hardly—

DAJA: Only stilled your hunger pangs.

RECHA: Well yes, if you like.

DAJA: Well I don't.

RECHA: He will always be dear to me, he'll stay dearer to me than my life, even if my pulse doesn't quicken at the sound of his name, even if my heart doesn't beat faster, harder whenever I think of him. What nonsense I'm talking! Come, come dear Daja, back to the window that overlooks the palms.

DAJA: Then they aren't completely stilled yet, your hunger pangs.

RECHA: Now I'll also see the palms again, not just him beneath the palms.

DAJA: This chill is only the beginning of a new fever.

RECHA: What chill? I'm not cold. I really don't see with less pleasure what I see with calm.

Scene 4

Scene: A reception hall in Saladin's palace.

Saladin and Sittah.

SALADIN: [*Walking in, toward the doors.*] Bring the Jew here as soon as he comes. He doesn't seem to be in too much of a hurry.

SITTAH: He wasn't exactly at hand, wasn't easy to find.

SALADIN: Sister! Sister!

SITTAH: You act as though you were about to go into battle.

SALADIN: And with weapons that I haven't learned to use. I'm supposed to dissimulate, to incite fear; supposed to lay traps, trick him. When have I ever been able to do that? Where would I have learned it? And why do I have to do all this? What for? To fish for money. Money! To scare up money, money from a Jew. Money! Have I finally been brought to such petty tricks, to get myself the most trifling of trifles?

SITTAH: Every trifle you scorn too much will avenge itself, brother.

SALADIN: All too true. And if this Jew is the good, reasonable man that the dervish described earlier?

SITTAH: Well then! Why would it be necessary? The snare lies only for the stingy, anxious, fearful Jew; not for the good, not for the wise man. This one is already ours, without a snare. The pleasure of hearing how such a man tries to talk his way out of it, with what daring strength he just rips through the cord, or with what sly caution he avoids the net: this pleasure you'll have anyway.

SALADIN: Well, that's true. I'm certainly looking forward to it.

SITTAH: Then nothing else can embarrass you. If he's just one of the crowd, if he's just a Jew like any other, then in front of him will you be ashamed to be what he thinks all people are? Even more, whoever shows himself better, to the Jew he's just an ass, a fool.

SALADIN: Then I have to act badly so the bad one doesn't think badly of me?

SITTAH: Really! If you call it acting badly to use such a thing after its own fashion.

SALADIN: What couldn't a woman's head invent that it couldn't put in a favorable light!

SITTAH: Put in a favorable light!

SALADIN: I'm just worried that this fine, sharp thing will break in my clumsy hand! Such a thing needs to be carried out as it was invented: with all cunning and agility. Be that as it may! I'll dance as well as I can, though I'd naturally rather do it well than badly.

SITTAH: Just don't trust yourself too little! I'll vouch for you if you don't! If only you want me to. How men such as you like to convince us that only their sword, their sword alone has brought them so far. The lion is naturally ashamed when it hunts with the fox—ashamed of the fox, not the cunning.

SALADIN: And how women like to bring men down to their level! Just go, go! I think I know my lesson.

SITTAH: What? I'm supposed to go?

SALADIN: You didn't want to stay, did you?

SITTAH: If not stay . . . in your sight, just here in the next room.

SALADIN: To listen? Not that either, sister, if you don't mind my insisting on it. Go! Go! The curtain is moving. He's coming! Don't stay

there! I'll make sure. [*As she moves away from one door, Nathan steps in through the other; and Saladin has sat down.*]

Scene 5

Saladin and Nathan.

SALADIN: Step closer, Jew! Closer! All the way! But without fear!

NATHAN: Fear is for your enemies!

SALADIN: You call yourself Nathan?

NATHAN: Yes.

SALADIN: Wise Nathan?

NATHAN: No.

SALADIN: Right! You don't call yourself that. The people call you that.

NATHAN: Maybe; the people!

SALADIN: You don't think I have contempt for the voice of the people, do you? I've long wanted to meet a man they call "the wise."

NATHAN: And if they call him that to make fun of him? If to the people wise is nothing more than smart? And if only the one who understands what's in his interest is considered smart?

SALADIN: In his true interest, you mean?

NATHAN: Then the most selfish person would naturally be the smartest. Then smart and wise would naturally be the same thing.

SALADIN: I can hear you prove what you want to refute. You know the true interests of the people, which they themselves don't know. At least you've tried to find out, you've thought about them: this alone makes one wise.

NATHAN: As everyone considers himself to be.

SALADIN: Enough modesty! To keep hearing it when you expect dry reason is sickening. [*He jumps up.*] Let's get to the point! But, but honestly, Jew, honestly!

NATHAN: Sultan, I certainly want to serve you in such a way that I remain worthy of your business in the future.

SALADIN: Serve? What?

NATHAN: You should have the best of everything, and at the lowest of prices.

SALADIN: What are you talking about? Not your goods? Though my sister will be happy to haggle with you. [*Aside:* That's for the little eavesdropper!] I have nothing to do with businessmen.

NATHAN: Then you must want to know what I noticed or encountered on my trip about the enemy, who is of course stirring again? If I may be frank . . .

SALADIN: That's not where I'm headed with you either. I know as much about that as I need to. In brief . . .

NATHAN: Command, Sultan.

SALADIN: I request your instruction in something completely different, something completely different. Since you're so wise, then tell me: Which religion, which law makes the most sense to you?

NATHAN: Sultan, I'm a Jew.

SALADIN: And I'm a Muslim. The Christian is between us. Only one of these religions can be the true one. A man like you doesn't stay where the accident of birth threw him. Or when he does stay there, it's because of insight, reasons, the better choice. Now then! Share your insight with me. Let me hear the reasons that I haven't had the time to ponder. Let me know the choice—in confidence, naturally—that these reasons have determined, so I can make it mine. What? You're surprised? You're looking at me, trying to figure me out? It may very well be that I'm the first Sultan to have such a whim, which after all I don't think is so unworthy of a Sultan. Don't you agree? Then talk! Speak! Or do you want a moment to think it over? Fine, I'll give it to you. [*Aside:* I wonder if she's listening. Now I want to listen to her, to hear if I've done it right.] Think about it. Think about it quickly! I won't hesitate to come back. [*He goes into the next room, where Sittah has gone.*]

Scene 6

Nathan, alone.

Hm! Hm! Strange! What should I think? What does the Sultan want? What? I'm prepared for money, and he wants . . . truth. Truth! And he wants it like that, so bare, so shiny, as though the truth were a coin! Now if it were an ancient coin being weighed, that would be one thing. But such a new coin, that only a stamp can make, that you can just count on a counter, that's not what the truth is. Like money in a bag, can you rake truth into your head? Who's

the Jew here? Me or him? But wait! What if in truth he's not asking for truth? Of course it would be too small to suspect him of using the truth as a trap! Too small? What's too small for a great man? Really, really, the way he blurted it out! You have to be gentler when you approach someone as a friend. I have to move carefully! But how? How should I? To be so completely Jewish won't work. And not to be Jewish at all will be worse. Since if I'm not Jewish, he could ask me, why not be a Muslim? That's it! That can save me! It's not just children who can be humored with fairy tales. He's coming. Let him come!

Scene 7

Saladin and Nathan.

SALADIN: [*Aside:* The coast is clear!] Am I coming back too soon? You're at the end of your reflections. Then talk! Not a soul can hear us.

NATHAN: Let the whole world hear us.

SALADIN: So sure Nathan is about the matter? Well! That's what I call a wise man! Never hiding the truth! Risking everything for it! Life and limb! His possessions and his blood!

NATHAN: Yes! Yes! When it's necessary and useful.

SALADIN: From now on I can hope to have rightfully as one of my titles, Improver of the World and of the Law.

NATHAN: Surely a lovely title! But, Sultan, before I tell you everything, may I tell you a story?

SALADIN: Why not? I've always been fond of well-told stories.

NATHAN: Now, telling stories *well* isn't exactly my talent.

SALADIN: So proudly modest again? Do it! Tell, tell!

NATHAN: Many years ago in the east there lived a man who owned a ring of inestimable worth, which someone dear to him had given him. The stone was an opal that sparkled with a hundred beautiful colors and had the mysterious power of making whoever wore it agreeable to God and human beings, as long as the wearer believed in its power. Is it any wonder that the man in the east never let it off his finger, or that he ordered it never to leave the possession of his family? And this is how it went. He left the ring to his favorite son, and stipulated that this son also leave the ring to the son he loved

best. And always the favorite, owing only to his possession of the ring and without respect to his birth order, would be the head, the prince of the house. You understand me, Sultan?

SALADIN: I understand you. Go on!

NATHAN: The ring went in this way from son to son until it came to a father of three sons, all of whom were equally obedient and all of whom he therefore couldn't help loving equally. Yet from time to time the first one, or the second, or the third—at the moment when he found himself alone with one of them and the other two couldn't share the outpourings of his heart—seemed more worthy of the ring, and in his gentle weakness he promised it to each of them. This worked well enough for as long as it worked. But then it came time to die and the good father found himself in a difficult position. It grieved him to hurt in this way two of his sons, who trusted him in his word. What to do? He secretly sent for an artist and ordered, according to the design of his ring, two new ones, and he told him to spare no expense at making each of them identical, completely identical to his ring. The artist succeeded. When he brought the rings, the father himself couldn't tell which was the original. Happily and cheerfully he called for his sons, one at a time, and gave each one his special blessing, and his ring, then he died. Are you listening, Sultan?

SALADIN: [*Upset, turning away from him.*] I'm listening, I'm listening! Just finish your story quickly, will you?

NATHAN: I'm finished. What follows goes without saying. The father was hardly dead when each son came with his ring, and each wanted to be prince of the house. They scrutinized, bickered, complained. In vain. The true ring was indistinguishable—[*After a pause to wait for the Sultan's response.*]—almost as indistinguishable as the true religion is to us.

SALADIN: What? This is the answer to my question? . . .

NATHAN: Excuse me if I don't dare to distinguish between the rings that the father deliberately had made so that they couldn't be distinguished.

SALADIN: The rings! Don't play with me! I would have thought that the religions I mentioned were, on the contrary, quite easily distinguished. All the way down to their clothing, all the way down to their food and drink.

NATHAN: Just not in their foundations. After all, aren't they all grounded in history? Written or passed down! And history can only be accepted on faith and belief, right? Well, whose faith and belief are we least likely to call into question? Isn't it our own, that of the people to whom we belong? Of the people who from childhood on have given us proof of their love? Who never deceived us, except when deception was better for us? How can I believe my forefathers less than you believe yours, or vice versa? Can I demand that you charge your ancestors with lying, so that you don't contradict mine? Or vice versa? The same applies to the Christians, right?

SALADIN: [*Aside:* By God! The man is right. I should be quiet.]

NATHAN: Let's get back to our rings. As I was saying: the sons sued each other, and each swore to the judge that he had gotten the ring directly from his father's hand—And how true!—long after he had gotten the promise that he would one day enjoy the ring's privilege. No less true! Each asserted that his father could never have deceived him. And before suspecting such a dear father of this, each said, he was compelled to accuse his brothers of fraud—however ready he normally was to believe the best about them. And each said he wanted to find out who the traitor was, so he could avenge himself.

SALADIN: And then, the judge? I can't wait to hear what you'll have the judge say. Speak!

NATHAN: The judge said, "If you can't bring your father right here, then I order you away from my bench. Do you think I'm here to solve riddles? Or are you waiting for the true ring to open its mouth? But wait! I hear that the true ring has the miraculous power of making its wearer loved, agreeable to God and human beings. That should decide the matter! For the false rings couldn't do that! Well, which one of you do the other two love the most? Go ahead, say it! You're not saying anything? The rings only work in reverse, inwardly and not outwardly? Each of you loves himself the most? Oh, then all three of you are deceived deceivers! None of your rings is the real one. The real ring must have been lost. To hide the loss, to replace it, your father had three made for one."

SALADIN: Wonderful! Wonderful!

NATHAN: "And so," the judge continued, "if you'd rather have my ruling than my advice, then just leave. But my advice is that you take the case purely as it stands. Each of you has his ring from his

father, so let each believe that he has the true one. But it's possible that your father could no longer stand the tyranny of *one* ring in his house! And it's certain that he loved all three of you, and equally, since he couldn't treat two of you unfairly to please the third. Let each of you rival the others only in uncorrupted love, free from prejudice. Let each of you strive to show the power of his ring's stone. Come to the aid of this power in gentleness, with heartfelt tolerance, in charity, with sincerest submission to God. And should the powers of the stone express themselves in your children's children's children, then let them come again before this bench. Then a wiser man than I will sit before them and rule. Go!" Thus spoke the modest judge.

SALADIN: God! God!

NATHAN: Saladin, if you feel you're this foretold wiser man . . .

SALADIN: [*Rushing toward him and gripping his hand, not letting it go.*] This dust? This nothing? O God!

NATHAN: What's the matter, Sultan?

SALADIN: Nathan, dear Nathan! Your judge's thousand years aren't over yet. His judge's bench isn't mine. Go! Go! But be my friend.

NATHAN: And Saladin has nothing more to say?

SALADIN: Nothing.

NATHAN: Nothing?

SALADIN: Nothing at all. Why?

NATHAN: I would have liked the opportunity to ask a favor of you.

SALADIN: Does asking a favor require an opportunity? Speak!

NATHAN: I've come back from a long trip, during which I collected debts. I almost have too much cash. The times are becoming worrisome again, and I don't know very well where it would be safe. So I wondered whether you might not need some, as coming war always needs money.

SALADIN: [*Looking him straight in the eye.*] Nathan! I won't ask whether Al-Hafi has been to see you, won't investigate whether some other suspicion has driven you to make this voluntary offer . . .

NATHAN: A suspicion?

SALADIN: I'm worthy of it. Forgive me! What's the use? I must admit to you that I had the idea . . .

NATHAN: Not of asking me for that?

SALADIN: It's true.

NATHAN: That would have helped both of us! If I can't send you all my money, that's because of the young Templar. Of course you know him. First I have to give him a large payment.

SALADIN: Templar? You wouldn't want to support my worst enemy with your money, would you?

NATHAN: I'm only speaking of the one whose life you spared.

SALADIN: Ah! What you've reminded me of! I'd completely forgotten this young man! Do you know him? Where is he?

NATHAN: What? Then you don't know how your grace toward him has flowed from him to me? He, risking his own newly spared life, he saved my daughter from a fire.

SALADIN: He did? He did that? Ha! He looked like that. My brother, whom he so resembles, would certainly have done the same thing! Is he still here? Then bring him to me! I've told my sister so much about this brother of hers whom she never met that I should let her see his spitting image! Go get him! How from *one* good deed, though born of pure feeling, so many other good deeds flow! Go get him!

NATHAN: [*Letting go of Saladin's hand.*] Right away! And we still have an agreement about the other thing? [*Exit.*]

SALADIN: Ah! If only I'd let my sister listen! I have to go to her! How can I tell her everything I've learned? [*Exit from the other side.*]

Scene 8

Scene: Beneath the palms near the monastery, where the Templar waits for Nathan.

TEMPLAR: [*Walking back and forth, struggling with himself, until he bursts forth.*] Here the tired sacrificial victim pauses. Alright! I can't know, can't know any better what's happening inside me. I can't figure out what's going to happen. Suffice it to say I ran away in vain! In vain. And yet I couldn't do anything but run away! Now come what may! The blow fell too quickly to avoid it. I refused long and hard to come under it. Seeing her, whom I had so little desire to see—seeing her, and then the decision never to let her out of my sight. What decision? A decision is an intention, a deed. But I, I endured, I only endured. Seeing her, and the feeling of being bound

up with her, of being interwoven with her, were one and the same. Remain one and the same. To live apart from her is completely unthinkable to me. That would be my death, and wherever I might go after death, it would be my death there too. If that's love, then the Templar truly loves, the Christian truly loves the Jewish girl. Hm! And so what? I've given up more than one prejudice in this praised land, and for that reason it will always be praised by me.[36] What does my order want? As a Templar I'm dead, was dead from the moment I became Saladin's prisoner. The head that Saladin granted me, was it my old one? It's a new one that doesn't know anything about what was talked into the old one and constrained it. And it's a better one, better suited to my father's Heaven. I truly feel that. For the first time I'm beginning to think as my father must have thought when he was here, if I haven't been deceived by fairy tales about him. Fairy tales? But very believable ones. They've never seemed more believable to me than now that I run the danger of stumbling where he fell. He fell? I would rather fall with men than stand with children. His example guarantees me his approval. And whose approval do I need besides his? Nathan's? From him I'll have encouragement, not only approval. What a Jew! And one who wants to be seen only as a Jew! Here he comes, he's hurrying, glowing with clear joy. But who ever came from Saladin not looking that way? Hey, hey Nathan!

Scene 9

Nathan and the Templar.

NATHAN: What? Is it you?

TEMPLAR: You stayed a long time at the Sultan's.

NATHAN: Not that long. I hesitated too long on the way there. Oh really, Curd, that man lives up to his reputation. His reputation is just his shadow. But before anything else let me quickly tell you . . .

TEMPLAR: What?

NATHAN: He wants to speak to you, wants you to come to him immediately. Just come back to my house, where I have something else for him, and then we'll go.

[36]This pun is untranslatable. In German "gelobtes Land" is equivalent to "Promised Land," though it literally means "praised land."

TEMPLAR: Nathan, I'd rather not go to your house . . .

NATHAN: But haven't you already been there? Haven't you already spoken to her? Well? Tell me, how do you like Recha?

TEMPLAR: Indescribably! But, to see her again, I'll never be able to do that! Never! Never! Unless you promise me right now that I'll be able to see her again and again, forever.

NATHAN: How am I supposed to understand that?

TEMPLAR: [*After a short pause throwing his arms around him.*] My father!

NATHAN: Young man!

TEMPLAR: [*Quickly letting go of him.*] Not "son"? I beg you, Nathan!

NATHAN: Dear young man!

TEMPLAR: Not "son"? I beg you, Nathan! I implore you, by the first bonds of nature! Don't prefer the chains that came later! Be content to be a human being. Don't push me away from you!

NATHAN: Dear, dear friend! . . .

TEMPLAR: And "son"? Not "son"? Not even if gratitude opened the way for love to reach your daughter's heart? Not even if both of us were just waiting for a sign from you to melt into one? You're not saying anything?

NATHAN: You surprise me, young knight.

TEMPLAR: I surprise you? Surprise you, Nathan, with your own thoughts? You're not disavowing them when they come out of my mouth, are you? I surprise you?

NATHAN: First I have to know which Stauffen your father was!

TEMPLAR: What are you saying, Nathan? What? At this moment nothing else occurs to you but curiosity?

NATHAN: But you see, I once knew a Stauffen named Conrad.

TEMPLAR: Well, what if that was my father's name?

NATHAN: Really?

TEMPLAR: I'm named after him. Curd is Conrad.

NATHAN: Well, then the Conrad I knew couldn't have been your father, since my Conrad was, like you, a Templar, was never married.

TEMPLAR: Oh, for that reason!

NATHAN: Well?

TEMPLAR: Despite that, he still could have been my father.

NATHAN: You're joking.

TEMPLAR: And you're taking my father's celibacy all too literally. What difference does it make? So what if I'm a bastard? We're not such a contemptible breed. Just spare me this probe into my ancestry, and I won't look into yours. Not that I have the slightest doubt about your family tree. God forbid! You could cover it leaf by leaf all the way back to Abraham. And from there even further, I know it myself. I'll testify to it myself.

NATHAN: You're becoming bitter. But do I deserve this? Have I refused you anything? It's just that at the moment I don't want to take you at your word. That's all.

TEMPLAR: Really? Nothing more? Oh, then forgive me!

NATHAN: Just come now, come!

TEMPLAR: Where? No! Home with you? Not that! Not that! There's fire there! I'll wait for you here. Go! If I see her again, I'll see her often enough. If not, then I've seen her far too much . . .

NATHAN: I'll go as quickly as I can.

ACT 4

Scene 1

Scene: In the cloisters of the monastery.

The Friar and the Templar following soon thereafter.

FRIAR: Yes, yes! I suppose the Patriarch is right! I haven't been very successful with all the things he's asked me to do. But why does he ask me to do these things? I don't want to be delicate, don't want to be persuasive. I don't want to stick my nose into everything, to have my hand in everything. Is this why I separated myself from the world, I for myself, just to get tied up in the world for the sake of others?

TEMPLAR: [*Quickly coming toward him.*] Good brother! There you are. I've been looking for you for a long time.

FRIAR: Me, sir?

TEMPLAR: Don't you remember me?

FRIAR: Yes, of course! I just thought I'd never have the opportunity to

see you again in my life, sir. I hoped to God I wouldn't. God knows how I hated the task that brought me to you, sir. He knows whether I hoped to find an open ear in you. He knows how happy I was, how sincerely happy, to see you completely reject everything, without giving it much thought, that didn't suit a knight. Now you're here after all; it had a delayed effect on you.

TEMPLAR: You already know why I've come? I hardly know myself.

FRIAR: You've thought it over and decided that the Patriarch wasn't so wrong after all; that you could earn honor and money by his attack, that an enemy is an enemy, even if it was seven times an angel to us. You weighed all that with flesh and blood, and now you're back to apply for the job. Oh God!

TEMPLAR: My dear, good man! Rest assured, it's not for that reason that I've come; it's not for that reason that I want to speak to the Patriarch. I still think the same way about that point as I thought before, and for everything in the world wouldn't want to lose the good opinion that such an upright, good, dear man once honored me with. I've only come to ask the Patriarch for advice on a matter . . .

FRIAR: You're asking the advice of the Patriarch? A knight's asking advice from a . . . cleric? [*Looking around timidly.*]

TEMPLAR: Yes. It's a rather clerical matter.

FRIAR: Yet the cleric never asks the knight for advice, no matter how knightly the matter may be.

TEMPLAR: Because he has the privilege of being able to make a mistake; people like us don't envy him that. Certainly, if the matter concerned me alone, if I were only accountable to myself, what would I need your Patriarch for? But there are certain things that I'd rather have badly done by the will of another than well done by my own. Besides, I now see very well that religion is a partisan thing. And whoever thinks he's non-partisan is just holding his party's flag without realizing it. And since that's the way it is, it must be right.

FRIAR: On that I'd rather not say anything, since I don't really understand you, sir.

TEMPLAR: And yet! [*Aside:* Let's see, what should I do, really? Ask for an order or advice? For simple or scholarly advice?] I thank you, brother, thank you for the good tip. Who needs a Patriarch? You can be my Patriarch! For an adviser I'd rather have more Christian in the Patriarch than Patriarch in the Christian. This is what . . .

FRIAR: No more, sir, no more! What's the point? You misunderstand me, sir. He who knows a lot has a lot of worries. And I've only agreed to a *single* worry. Oh good! Listen! Look! Here he comes himself, thank goodness. Stay right here. He's already seen you.

Scene 2

The previous and the Patriarch, approaching the cloister with the highest degree of priestly splendor.

TEMPLAR: I'd rather avoid him. He couldn't be my man! A fat, red, friendly prelate! And what pomp!

FRIAR: You should see how he puffs himself up when he goes to court. Now he's only been to visit a sick person.

TEMPLAR: Saladin himself would be embarrassed next to him!

PATRIARCH: [*Waving to the friar as he comes closer.*] Here! That must be the Templar. What does he want?

FRIAR: Don't know.

PATRIARCH: [*Going toward him while the friar and the entourage step back.*] Now, sir knight! So happy to see the good young man! Oh, and still so young! Now, with God's help, something may come of you.

TEMPLAR: Hardly more, worthy sir, than has already come. And possibly even less.

PATRIARCH: At least I would like to see such a good knight long blossom and flourish for the honor and benefit of Christendom and the Godly cause! That won't fail to come to pass as long as young bravery carefully follows the advice of age! How else can I serve you, sir?

TEMPLAR: With the one thing I've lacked in my youth: with advice.

PATRIARCH: With pleasure! But only if the advice is also accepted.

TEMPLAR: But not blindly?

PATRIARCH: Who said that? Oh, nobody should fail to use the reason that God gave him—when appropriate. But is it always appropriate? Oh no! For example: if God deigns with the help of an angel—that is to say, with the help of a servant of his word—to make known to us a means of guaranteeing the welfare of all Christendom, the salvation of the Church in any peculiar way whatsoever, who would dare be so arbitrary as to examine according to reason

Him who created reason? And to test the eternal law of Heaven's glory according to the small rules of vain honor? But enough of that. About what, then, do you need advice for now, sir?

TEMPLAR: Suppose, reverend father, that a Jew had an only child—say, a girl—whom he brought up with the greatest care for her morality, whom he loved more than his own soul, and who loved him with the most pious love. And then it would be brought to our attention that this girl wasn't the Jew's daughter; that in her infancy he had found her, bought her, stolen her, whatever you like. It would be known that the girl was a Christian, and baptized; and that the Jew had only brought her up as a Jewess, had persisted in treating her as a Jewess and as his daughter. Tell me, reverend father, what would you do in such a situation?

PATRIARCH: I'm shuddering! But first of all you must explain, sir, whether such a case is a fact or a hypothesis. That is to say, sir, if you only made this up, or if it's happened and continues to happen.

TEMPLAR: I would have thought that this wouldn't matter if the goal was to learn your highly venerable opinion.

PATRIARCH: Wouldn't matter? There, sir, you see how proud, human reason can go wrong in matters of spiritual reason. On the contrary! For if the described case is nothing but a game of the imagination, then it isn't worth thinking through seriously. I would then prefer to refer you to the theatre, sir, where such pro and con arguments are treated with much applause. But if you haven't just tried to get the best of me in a theatrical game, sir, if the case is a fact, if it indeed took place in our diocese, in our beloved city of Jerusalem, well then . . .

TEMPLAR: What then?

PATRIARCH: Then the Jew would be immediately subjected to the penalty that papal and imperial law stipulate for such a wicked deed.

TEMPLAR: And?

PATRIARCH: And the above-stated laws condemn the Jew who seduces a Christian into apostasy to the funeral pyre, the wood pile . . .

TEMPLAR: And?

PATRIARCH: And all the more so the Jew who forcibly rips a poor Christian child from the bonds of baptism! For isn't everything that one does to children force? That is to say: except what the Church does to children.

TEMPLAR: But what if the Jew's pity saved the child from dying in misery?

PATRIARCH: Doesn't matter! The Jew will be burnt! For better to die in misery here than to be rescued only for eternal ruin. Besides, who is the Jew to pre-empt God? God can save whom he wishes without him.

TEMPLAR: Or despite him, I should think.

PATRIARCH: Doesn't matter! The Jew will be burnt!

TEMPLAR: That troubles me! Especially since it's said that he brought the girl up less in his belief than in no belief, and taught her no more and no less about God than reason requires.

PATRIARCH: Doesn't matter! The Jew will be burnt . . . Indeed for this alone he would deserve to be burnt three times! What? Letting a child grow up without any belief? Not at all teaching a child the great duty of believing? That is too wicked! I'm surprised at you, sir knight . . .

TEMPLAR: Reverend sir, we'll leave the rest for confession, if God wishes. [*Wants to leave.*]

PATRIARCH: What? You won't answer my question? Won't tell me who the Jew is? Won't bring him here to me? Oh, then I know what to do! I'll go at once to the Sultan. Saladin, according to the agreement that he swore to, must protect us, and must protect us according to all the laws, all the teachings that we have always relied upon in our holiest of religions! Praise God! We have the original. We have his handwriting, his seal. We do! And I'll also show him how dangerous it is for a state when one doesn't believe anything! All civic bonds are undone, ripped to pieces, when a human being is allowed to believe nothing. Away! Away with such wickedness!

TEMPLAR: Too bad I can't enjoy the excellent sermon with more leisure! I've been called to Saladin.

PATRIARCH: Really? Well then. Well indeed. Then . . .

TEMPLAR: I'll prepare the Sultan, if it pleases Your Reverence.

PATRIARCH: Oh! Oh! I know you found favor with Saladin! Please remind him of me only in the best terms. It's only zeal for God that drives me. What I do too much, I do for Him. You'll keep that in mind, sir, won't you? And isn't it true, sir knight, that what you mentioned about the Jew was only a hypothetical problem? That is to say . . .

TEMPLAR: A hypothetical problem. [*Exit.*]

PATRIARCH: [*Aside:* I must get to the bottom of this. This would be another job for Brother Bonafides.] Here, my son! [*Speaking while walking away with the friar.*]

Scene 3

Scene: A room in Saladin's palace into which slaves carry a large quantity of bags and set them side by side on the floor.

Saladin and Sittah following shortly thereafter.

SALADIN: [*Coming forward.*] Well really! This is endless. Is there much more of the stuff coming?

A SLAVE: At least half of it.

SALADIN: Then bring the rest to Sittah. And where's Al-Hafi? Al-Hafi should take this immediately. Or maybe I should send it to father? Here it will only slip through my fingers. But one finally learns to be tough, and now it will truly take talent to get much out of me. At least until the money arrives from Egypt, the poor will have to learn how to make ends meet! If only the alms at the Holy Sepulchre can continue![37] If only the Christian pilgrims don't have to leave empty handed! If only . . .

SITTAH: What's with all this? Why am I getting all this money?

SALADIN: You're being paid, and lay aside what's left over.

SITTAH: Hasn't Nathan arrived with the Templar yet?

SALADIN: He's looking for him everywhere.

SITTAH: But look at what I found here while all these old trinkets went through my hands. [*Showing him a small painting.*]

SALADIN: Hey! My brother! It's him, it's him! It was him, was him! Oh! Oh brave, dear boy, if only I hadn't lost you so early! What I wouldn't have undertaken with you at my side! Sittah, give me the picture. I recognize it. He gave it to your older sister, his Lilla, who one morning simply wouldn't let him out of her arms. It was the last time he rode away. Oh, I let him ride, and alone! Oh, Lilla died

[37]The Holy Sepulchre is the tomb in Jerusalem in which Jesus is believed by Christians to have been buried. As stipulated in the cease-fire agreement of 1192, Christian pilgrims were permitted free access to this site under Saladin's control.

of grief, and never forgave me for letting him ride alone like that. He didn't come back!

SITTAH: Poor brother!

SALADIN: Never mind! Eventually we all die! Eventually all of us don't come back! Besides, who knows? It's not only death that could divert a youngster like him from his goal. He had other enemies. And often the strongest succumbs to the weakest. Well, be that as it may! I still have to compare the picture with the young Templar, have to see how badly my imagination deceived me.

SITTAH: It's only for that reason that I'm bringing it. But give it to me, give it! I want to be the one to tell you. A woman's eye understands these things best.

SALADIN: [*To a gatekeeper who walks in.*] Who's there? The Templar? Let him in!

SITTAH: So I don't disturb you, so I don't confuse him with my curiosity. [*She sits down sideways on a sofa and drops a veil over her face.*]

SALADIN: That's good! Good! [*Aside:* And now his voice! I wonder what it will sound like! Assad's voice still sleeps somewhere in my soul!]

Scene 4

The Templar and Saladin.

TEMPLAR: I, your prisoner, Sultan . . .

SALADIN: My prisoner? To whomever I give life, don't I also give freedom?

TEMPLAR: What is appropriate for you to do is for me to learn, not to presume. But, Sultan, thank you, thank you especially for vouchsafing my life, though neither my stature nor my character deserves this. In any case my life is in your service again.

SALADIN: Just don't use it against me! A couple more hands I'd gladly allow my enemies. But allowing them such a heart too would be hard for me. I haven't been deceived in you, worthy young man! You are my Assad in body and soul. Look! I could ask you: Where have you been hiding the whole time? In what cave have you been sleeping? In what fairyland, thanks to what good spirit has this flower stayed so strong and fresh? Look! I could remind you of what we did together here and there. I could bicker with you about

the *one* secret you kept from me, the *one* adventure you kept silent about! Yes I could do that if I only saw you and not myself too. Well, be that as it may! There's so much truth in this sweet daydream that an Assad should bloom again in the autumn of my life. Are you satisfied with this, knight?

TEMPLAR: Everything that comes from you—whatever it might be—is already a wish in my soul.

SALADIN: Then let's test that now. So you'll stay with me, and as part of my court? As Christian, as Muslim, it's all the same! In a white cloak or Jamerlonk,[38] a turban or your felt outfit. As you like it! It doesn't matter! I've never demanded that every tree grow *one* bark.

TEMPLAR: Otherwise you'd hardly be who you are: the hero who would rather be God's gardener.

SALADIN: Well then, if you don't think worse of me, then we're already halfway there?

TEMPLAR: All the way!

SALADIN: [*Offering his hand.*] Your word?

TEMPLAR: [*Shaking it.*] I'm your man! With this you'll receive more than you could take from me. I'm completely yours!

SALADIN: Too much profit for one day! Too much! Did he come with you?

TEMPLAR: Who?

SALADIN: Nathan.

TEMPLAR: [*Coldly.*] No. I came alone.

SALADIN: What a great deed you did! And what luck that such a deed made such a man so happy.

TEMPLAR: Yes, yes!

SALADIN: So cold? No, young man! When God does something good through us, we mustn't be so cold! We shouldn't even want to look so cold out of modesty!

TEMPLAR: How everything in the world has so many sides! It's often impossible to know how they all fit together!

SALADIN: Just always stick to the best side, and praise God! He knows how they fit together. But if you insist on being so difficult, young

[38]In a letter to his brother Karl, Lessing defined *Jamerlonk* as "the broad outer garment of the Arabs." *Sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 18, 313.

man, will I myself have to stay on my guard with you? Unfortunately I'm also a thing of many sides, which often don't seem to be able to fit together so well.

TEMPLAR: That hurts! Since suspicion is usually the least of my faults.

SALADIN: Well, then tell me, with whom do you have difficulties? Apparently with Nathan. But how? How could you be suspicious of Nathan? And you especially. Explain yourself! Speak! Come, give your trust in me a first try.

TEMPLAR: I don't have anything against Nathan. I'm only angry with myself.

SALADIN: And what about?

TEMPLAR: That I dreamt a Jew could learn how not to be a Jew, that I dreamt this while awake.

SALADIN: Out with this wakeful dream!

TEMPLAR: You know Nathan's daughter, Sultan. What I did for her I did . . . because I did it. Too proud to reap thanks where I didn't sow it, I refused day after day to see the girl again. Her father is far away. Then he comes, he hears, he seeks me out, he thanks, he wants me to like his daughter; speaks of prospects, speaks of a happy future. Now I let myself be talked into it, come, see, finally find a girl . . . Oh I should be ashamed, Sultan!

SALADIN: Ashamed? That a Jewish girl made an impression on you: are you serious?

TEMPLAR: That, encouraged by the pleasing chatter of her father, my rash heart offered so little resistance to this impression. What a fool I am! I jumped twice into the fire, since now *I* was the one to court, and now *I* was the one to be rejected.

SALADIN: Rejected?

TEMPLAR: The wise father didn't quite refuse me absolutely. But the wise father first has to make inquiries, to give it some thought. Really! Didn't I also do that? Didn't I also first make inquiries, give it some thought, when she screamed in the fire? Truly! By God! It truly is a beautiful thing to be so wise, so cautious!

SALADIN: Now, now! Don't be so hard on an old man! How long could his refusals still last? Is he going to demand that you become a Jew first?

TEMPLAR: Who knows?

SALADIN: Who knows? Anyone who knows this Nathan better.

TEMPLAR: The superstition that we grow up with doesn't lose its power over us even when we recognize it. Not everyone is free who makes fun of his chains.

SALADIN: A very mature observation! But Nathan, really, Nathan . . .

TEMPLAR: The worst superstition is the one that considers itself more justifiable than the others . . .

SALADIN: That may very well be! But Nathan . . .

TEMPLAR: To entrust the whole feeble human race to this superstition until the brighter day when the truth is revealed; to this superstition alone . . .

SALADIN: Right! But Nathan! Nathan's fate isn't to have this weakness.

TEMPLAR: That's what I thought too! But what if this paragon of humanity were such a common Jew that he would try to acquire Christian children in order to bring them up as Jews—what then?

SALADIN: Who's said such a thing about him?

TEMPLAR: The girl herself, with whom he enticed me, with whom he seemed ready to fulfill my hopes as a reward for my deed, that I shouldn't have done it in vain. This girl is not his daughter. She was an abandoned Christian child.

SALADIN: That he nevertheless didn't want to give you?

TEMPLAR: [*Sharply.*] Wants or doesn't want! He's been discovered. The tolerant chatterer has been discovered! I'll send the dogs after this Jewish wolf in philosophical sheep's clothing.

SALADIN: [*Seriously.*] Calm down, Christian!

TEMPLAR: What? Calm down, Christian? When Jew and Muslim insist on being Jew and Muslim: Should only the Christian not have the right to be a Christian?

SALADIN: [*Even more seriously.*] Calm down, Christian!

TEMPLAR: [*Calm.*] I feel the full burden of the reproach that Saladin has pressed into this word! Oh, if only I knew how Assad would have acted in my place!

SALADIN: Not much better! Presumably just as full of rage! But who taught you how you could so thoroughly charm me with *one* word? Truly if everything is as you say, I can hardly reconcile myself to such a Nathan. And yet he's my friend, and I won't allow my friends

to quarrel. Take my advice. Go carefully. Don't surrender Nathan so quickly to the fanatical Christian rabble! Keep quiet about things that your clergy would ask me to avenge against him. Don't be a Christian to spite any Jew or any Muslim!

TEMPLAR: It would be almost too late for that, if the blood lust of the Patriarch hadn't revolted me so that I refused to be his tool!

SALADIN: What? You went to the Patriarch before you came to me?

TEMPLAR: In the storm of passion, in the whirlwind of indecision! Forgive me! I'm afraid you won't want to see any more of your Assad in me.

SALADIN: If it weren't this fear itself! I think I know which errors our virtue sprouts from. Just cultivate these further, and they won't cause you any more difficulty with me. But go! Look for Nathan as he looked for you, and bring him here. I have to bring the two of you to an understanding. If you're serious about the girl, be reassured. She's yours! And Nathan should be made to realize the liberties he took in raising a Christian girl without pork![39] Go! [*The Templar exits and Sittah leaves the sofa.*]

Scene 5

Saladin and Sittah.

SITTAH: Very strange!

SALADIN: Isn't it so, Sittah? Mustn't my Assad have been a worthy, beautiful young man?

SITTAH: If he was like that, and if the Templar didn't sit for this portrait! But how could you have forgotten to ask about his parents?

SALADIN: And especially about his mother? Whether his mother might never have been here in this land? Right?

SITTAH: You'll make up for that!

SALADIN: Oh, nothing would be more possible! Since Assad was so welcome with pretty Christian ladies, and so intent on pretty Christian ladies, that there was once a rumor that... Well, well. I'd rather not discuss that. It's enough that I have him again! I want to have him again, with all his faults, with all the moods of his tender heart! Oh! Nathan has to give him his girl. Don't you think?

[39]A wry reference to the Jewish (as well as Muslim) prohibition against eating pork.

SITTAH: Give him? Leave him!

SALADIN: That's right! What right does Nathan have over her if he isn't her father? The one who saved her life is the only one who can take the place of the one who gave it to her.

SITTAH: Saladin, what if you brought the girl here? If you just removed her from her unrightful owner?

SALADIN: Would that really be necessary?

SITTAH: Well, not exactly necessary! It's just my dear curiosity that drives me to suggest that. Since from certain men I like all too much and as soon as possible to know what kind of girl they could love.

SALADIN: Well, then go and send for her.

SITTAH: May I, brother?

SALADIN: But spare Nathan! Nathan must by no means believe that I would want to separate him from her by force.

SITTAH: Don't worry.

SALADIN: And I, I myself have to see where Al-Hafi is.

Scene 6

Scene: The open hall in Nathan's house, opposite the palms, as in the first scene of the first act. A portion of the wares and valuables are on display, and these are the subject of conversation.

Nathan and Daja.

DAJA: Oh, everything's splendid! Everything's choice! Everything, as only you could give it. Where was the silver cloth with the golden shoots made? What did it cost? Now that's what I call a wedding dress! No queen could ask for a better one.

NATHAN: Wedding dress? Why a wedding dress?

DAJA: Well now! Of course you weren't thinking about that when you bought it. But really, Nathan, it has to be this and no other material. It's as though you ordered it to be made into a wedding dress. The white background, a symbol of innocence; and the gold streams that weave throughout this background, a symbol of wealth. You see? Delightful!

NATHAN: Why are you joking with me like this? Whose wedding dress are you interpreting in such learned fashion? Are you the bride?

DAJA: Me?

NATHAN: Who is it then?

DAJA: Me? Dear God!

NATHAN: Who is it then? Whose wedding dress are you talking about? All this is yours and no one else's.

DAJA: It's mine? It's supposed to be mine? Isn't it for Recha?

NATHAN: What I brought for Recha is lying in another bundle. Go! Take it away! Carry your belongings away!

DAJA: Tempter! No, if they were all the treasures in the world, I wouldn't touch them! Not unless you promise me first that you'll make use of this unique opportunity, the likes of which Heaven won't send again.

NATHAN: Use? Of what? Opportunity? For what?

DAJA: Oh don't pretend you don't understand! In short: the Templar loves Recha. Give her to him, and finally your sin, which I can no longer remain silent about, will be done with. And then the girl will be among Christians again, will be again what she is; is again, what she became: and you, with all the goodness that we can't thank you enough for, you won't have just heaped coals of fire upon your head.[40]

NATHAN: Oh that old song again? Equipped with a new verse that, I'm afraid, will neither stay in tune nor hold.

DAJA: Why?

NATHAN: The Templar would be fine with me. I'd rather give Recha to him than to anyone in the world. But . . . well, just be patient.

DAJA: Patient? Now isn't patience your old song?

NATHAN: Just a few more days of patience! Look! Who's coming there? A friar? Go ask him what he wants.

DAJA: What will he want? [*She goes up to him and asks.*]

[40]A reference to Proverbs 25:21–22, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink, for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head," and a similar command in Romans 12:20–21. Daja has taken this saying, which calls for *warm* or kind deeds, out of context, turning it into a metaphor for divine punishment. The implication is that if she is familiar with Scripture, she does not understand its meaning, a complaint that Lessing had against many contemporaries who considered themselves good Christians. This confusion is in keeping with Daja's previous sentences, which are similarly muddled.

NATHAN: So give him alms, and before he asks. [*Aside:* If only I knew how to approach the Templar without telling him the reason for my curiosity! Since if I tell him, and my suspicion is groundless, then I've risked my role as father for nothing.] What is it?

DAJA: He wants to speak to you.

NATHAN: Well, then let him come. And then go.

Scene 7

Nathan and the friar.

NATHAN: [*Aside:* How I'd love to stay Recha's father! But couldn't I still be her father even if that's no longer what I'm called? To her, to her alone I'll still be "father," if she recognizes how badly I want to be her father.] Go![41] What can I do for you, good brother?

FRIAR: Not much. I'm happy, sir Nathan, to see you.

NATHAN: So you know me?

FRIAR: Of course. Who doesn't know you? You've printed your name in the hands of so many.[42] It's remained in my hands too, for many years.

NATHAN: [*Reaching for his purse.*] Come, brother, come. I'll refresh the print.

FRIAR: No thanks! I'd be stealing from the poor. I won't take any. If only you'll allow me to refresh the print of *my* name. Then I can boast that I was able to put something worthwhile into *your* hands.

NATHAN: I beg your pardon! I'm ashamed. What were you going to say? And take as a penalty seven times the value of what you were about to give me.

FRIAR: But listen first of all to how I remembered for the first time today the pledge I entrusted to you.

NATHAN: Pledge you entrusted to me?

FRIAR: Not long ago I was a hermit on Mount Quarantana[43] near Jericho. Then a band of Arabian robbers came and destroyed my sanctuary and cell and carried me off. Luckily I escaped and ran to the

[41]Directed at Daja.

[42]That is, by giving alms.

[43]Named after the desert in which, according to Christian belief, Jesus spent his forty days of temptation.

Patriarch to beg him for another place where I could serve God alone until my blessed end.

NATHAN: I'm standing on coals, good brother. Make it short. The pledge! The pledge you entrusted to me!

FRIAR: Right away, sir Nathan. Now the Patriarch promised me a hermitage on Mount Tabor[44] as soon as one became available, and in the meantime ordered me to stay as a lay brother in the monastery. That's where I am now, sir Nathan, and long for Mount Tabor a hundred times a day. Because the Patriarch uses me for everything that disgusts me. For example:

NATHAN: Get to the point, I beg you!

FRIAR: Now it's coming! Someone hinted to him that somewhere around here is a Jew who raised a Christian child as his daughter.

NATHAN: What? [*Taken aback.*]

FRIAR: Just let me finish! While he was ordering me to track down this Jew right away, if possible, and growing angry at such an outrage, which seems to him the true sin against the Holy Spirit—that is, the sin which of all sins counts for us as the greatest sin, though, thank God, we don't quite know what it actually consists of[45]—suddenly my conscience woke up and it occurred to me that I myself might have been the one who long ago provided the opportunity for this unforgivably great sin. Say, didn't a horseman bring you a little daughter, a few weeks old, eighteen years ago.

NATHAN: What? Yes, truly—really . . .

FRIAR: Hey, look at me carefully! That horseman's me.

NATHAN: It's you?

FRIAR: The man I brought her from was a Herr von Filnek. Wolf von Filnek!

NATHAN: Right!

FRIAR: Since the mother had just recently died and the father had to rush, I believe, to Gaza,[46] where the little baby couldn't follow, he sent her to you. And didn't I meet you with her in Darum?[47]

[44]Mount Tabor is where Christians believe the Transfiguration of Christ occurred.

[45]This is a parody of the type of reasoning that Lessing believed many orthodox Christians used in their theological speculations.

[46]An ancient Mediterranean city in southern Palestine. It was conquered by Crusaders in 1100, then retaken by Saladin in 1170.

[47]A fortress south of Gaza on the Mediterranean.

NATHAN: Exactly!

FRIAR: It wouldn't be a wonder if my memory deceived me. I've had so many worthy masters, and I only served this one for such a short time. He died at Ascalon,[48] and was a kind man.

NATHAN: Yes indeed! Yes indeed! I have so many, many reasons to be grateful to him! More than once he saved me from the sword!

FRIAR: Wonderful! Then you must have been all the happier to take his little daughter.

NATHAN: You can imagine.

FRIAR: Well, where is she then? She hasn't died, has she? Don't let her be dead! And if no one else knows about the matter, everything will be alright.

NATHAN: Alright?

FRIAR: Trust me, Nathan! Look, this is how I see it. When something all too evil borders all too closely on the good that I think I'm doing, then I'd rather not do that good thing. Because we can more or less count on the evil, but not at all on the good. It was only natural, if you were going to bring up the little Christian daughter properly, that you would bring her up as your own daughter. That you would have done so out of love and fidelity, and this should be your reward? I don't think so. Oh really, if you had been smarter you would have let the Christian girl be raised as a Christian girl by someone else. But then you wouldn't have loved your friend's little child. And at that age children need love, if only the love of a wild animal, more than Christianity. For Christianity there's always time. As long as the girl grew up healthy and pious in your eyes, she remains in God's eyes what she was. And isn't all of Christianity built on Judaism? It's often angered me, it's cost me enough tears to see Christians forget so completely that our Lord himself was a Jew.

NATHAN: You, good brother, should be my advocate if hatred and hypocrisy rise up against me—on account of a deed—oh, on account of a deed! Only you, you alone will know of it! But take it with you to the grave! Vanity has never tempted me to tell anyone else. I'll tell only you. I'll tell only pious simplicity, since only that understands what deeds a human being devoted to God can bring himself to do.

[48]Ascalon (Ashkelon) was a Mediterranean city in southern Palestine (today Israel), just north of Gaza.

FRIAR: You're moved, and your eyes are full of water?

NATHAN: You met me with the child at Darum. But what you didn't know was that a few days earlier, in Gath,[49] the Christians had murdered all the Jews—men, women, and children—and you didn't know that among these were my wife and seven hopeful sons, whom I had sent to take refuge in my brother's house, and who all burned to death there.

FRIAR: God of Justice!

NATHAN: When you came I had lain before God for three days and nights in ashes and dust, and cried. Cried? Reckoned with God, was angry at him, raged against him, cursed myself and the world, swore the most unforgiving hatred of Christendom . . .

FRIAR: Oh I can believe you!

NATHAN: But then reason came back gradually. It said with a gentle voice, "And yet God exists! This too was God's decree! Now then! Come! Practice what you've long understood, what is surely no more difficult to practice than it is to understand, if only you want to. Stand up!" I stood! And I called to God, "I want to! If only you want me to want to!" Meanwhile you came down from your horse and handed me the child, wrapped in your coat. What you said to me, what I said to you, I've forgotten. All I know is this: I took the child, carried her back to my couch, kissed her, threw myself on my knees and sobbed, "God! For seven at least you've given me back one!"

FRIAR: Nathan! Nathan! You're a Christian! By God, you're a Christian! There never was a better Christian!

NATHAN: That's well for us! For what makes me a Christian to you makes you a Jew to me! But let's not just move each other. We have to do something! And though sevenfold love quickly bound me to this single foreign girl, though the thought kills me that in her I should lose my seven sons again, if Providence orders her out of my hands again—I'll obey!

FRIAR: Exactly! That's just what I thought of advising you to do! And your own good mind already guessed it!

NATHAN: It's just that she mustn't be carried off by the first to claim her!

FRIAR: No, certainly not!

NATHAN: Whoever doesn't have more of a right to her than I should at least have prior rights . . .

[49] A Mediterranean city in the vicinity of Ascalon.

FRIAR: Absolutely!

NATHAN: Given by nature and blood.

FRIAR: I think so too!

NATHAN: So quickly tell me the name of her brother or uncle or cousin or other male relative. I won't hold her back from him. She was made and raised to be the jewel of any family, of any religion. I hope you know more about this man and his family than I do.

FRIAR: That, good Nathan, I can hardly do! You've just heard that I was with him for far too short a time.

NATHAN: Don't you at least know what family her mother came from? Wasn't she a Stauffen?

FRIAR: Quite possibly! Yes, it seems to me she was.

NATHAN: Wasn't her brother Conrad von Stauffen? And a Templar?

FRIAR: If I'm not mistaken. But wait! I just remembered that I still have a little book from the blessed man. I took it from his breast pocket when we buried him at Ascalon.

NATHAN: And?

FRIAR: There are prayers in it. We call it a breviary. I thought a Christian could make good use of it. Of course I couldn't. I can't read.

NATHAN: Doesn't matter! Just get to the point.

FRIAR: In this little book my master wrote, in the front and the back, with his own hand, I've been told, the names of his relatives and hers.

NATHAN: Oh wonderful! Go! Run! Get me the little book. Quickly! I'm prepared to pay its weight in gold. And a thousand thanks too! Hurry! Run!

FRIAR: I'll be glad to! But what my master wrote is in Arabic. [*Exit.*]

NATHAN: That doesn't matter! Just bring it here! God! If I could only keep the girl and get such a son-in-law in the bargain! That's hardly likely! Well, come what will! But who could it have been who told the Patriarch? I mustn't forget to ask that. I wonder if it was Daja.

Scene 8

Daja and Nathan.

DAJA: [*Hurrying and embarrassed.*] Just think, Nathan!

NATHAN: Yes?

DAJA: The poor child really got a scare! A message from . . .

NATHAN: The Patriarch?

DAJA: The Sultan's sister, Princess Sittah . . .

NATHAN: Not the Patriarch?

DAJA: No. Sittah! Can't you hear? Princess Sittah has sent a message and is having her brought to her.

NATHAN: Who? Having Recha brought to her? Sittah's having her brought to her? Well, if it's Sittah, and not the Patriarch . . .

DAJA: What made you think of him?

NATHAN: So you haven't recently heard anything from him? You're sure you haven't? And you haven't told him anything?

DAJA: Me? Him?

NATHAN: Where are the messengers?

DAJA: In front.

NATHAN: I want to speak to them, just to make sure. Come! I just hope the Patriarch isn't behind any of this. [*Exit.*]

DAJA: And I—I'm afraid of something completely different. It seems the supposed only daughter of such a rich Jew isn't so bad for a Muslim. That's it. The Templar has lost her. Lost her, unless I dare to take the second step and reveal to her who she is! Don't worry! Let me make use of the first moment when I have her alone! And that moment will come, perhaps right now if I accompany her. At least a first hint on the way can't hurt. Yes, yes! Do it! Now or never! Do it! [*After him.*]

ACT 5

Scene 1

Scene: The room in Saladin's palace into which the money bags, which are still visible, have been carried.

Saladin and various Mamelukes following shortly thereafter.

SALADIN: [*Stepping in.*] Well, the money's still sitting there! And no one knows where to find the dervish, who presumably got so involved with the chessboard that he forgot himself. Why shouldn't he have forgotten me too? Just be patient! What is it?

MAMELUKE: Good news, Sultan! Wonderful, Sultan! The Caravan from

Cairo has come, it's safely arrived! And with seven years' tribute from the rich Nile.

SALADIN: Good, Ibrahim! You're truly a welcome messenger! Ah! Finally! Finally! Thank you for the good news.

MAMELUKE: [*Waiting.*] [*Aside:* Well? Let's have it!]

SALADIN: What are you waiting for? You can go now.

MAMELUKE: Nothing else for the welcome messenger?

SALADIN: What do you mean?

MAMELUKE: No tip for the good messenger? Then I'll be the first person Saladin ever learned to reward with words? That's also an honor! The first one he was ever stingy to.

SALADIN: Then take a bag for yourself.

MAMELUKE: No, not now! You could try to give them all to me now. Forget about it.

SALADIN: Stubborn, are you! Here, take two. Is he serious? He's leaving? He's trying to outdo me in nobility? After all, it must be harder for him to refuse me than for me to give to him. Ibrahim! What was I thinking: to become a completely different person so shortly before my departure? Doesn't Saladin want to die as Saladin? Then mustn't he live as Saladin?

SECOND MAMELUKE: Well, Sultan!

SALADIN: If you're coming to tell me . . .

SECOND MAMELUKE: That the shipment from Egypt has come!

SALADIN: I already know.

SECOND MAMELUKE: Then I've come too late!

SALADIN: Why too late? For your good intentions take a bag or two.

SECOND MAMELUKE: Make it three!

SALADIN: Yes, if you know how to count! Just take them.

SECOND MAMELUKE: A third messenger should come, that is, if he manages to make it.

SALADIN: Why shouldn't he?

SECOND MAMELUKE: Well, he might have broken his neck! Since as soon as we three learned of the arrival of the shipment, everyone left in a hurry. The first one crashed, and so I arrived first in the city, but Ibrahim, the scoundrel, knows his way around the streets better than I do.

SALADIN: Oh, the one who crashed! Friend, the one who crashed! Ride to him at once.

SECOND MAMELUKE: I'll do that! And if he's alive then half of this bag is his. [*Exit.*]

SALADIN: What a good, noble fellow he is! Who else can boast of such Mamelukes? And would I be wrong to think that my example helped to make them this way? Don't even think about getting them used to a different example!

THIRD MAMELUKE: Sultan . . .

SALADIN: Are you the one who crashed?

THIRD MAMELUKE: No. I'm just here to report that Emir Mansor, who led the caravan, is dismounting . . .

SALADIN: Bring him here! Quickly! There he is now!

Scene 2

Emir Mansor and Saladin.

SALADIN: Welcome, Emir! Well, how did it go? Mansor, Mansor, you've left us waiting so long!

EMIR MANSOR: This letter reports what unrest your Abulkassem had to quell in Thebais[50] before we dared leave. I tried to speed the caravan as much as possible.

SALADIN: I believe you! And now, good Mansor, take immediately . . . You'll do so gladly, won't you? Take a fresh convoy immediately. You must go further. You must bring the greater part of the money to my father in Lebanon.

EMIR MANSOR: Gladly! Very gladly!

SALADIN: And see to it that your convoy isn't too weak. Things in Lebanon aren't so secure anymore. Haven't you heard? The Templars are moving again. Be on your guard! Come now! Where's the caravan? I want to see it and manage everything myself. Hey, you! I'll be with Sittah in a minute.

[50]Abulkassem is apparently a fictional character. The uprising to which the Emir refers is imagined. Thebais, named for its principal city of Thebes, is the region also known as Upper Egypt.

Scene 3

Scene: The palms in front of Nathan's house, where the Templar walks back and forth.

TEMPLAR: I don't want to go into his house. He's sure to show up sooner or later. I used to be noticed so quickly, so happily! Now I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't let me spend so much time in front of his house. Hm! I'm still rather angry. But what is it that made me so bitter toward him? He said he wouldn't refuse me anything. And Saladin has taken it upon himself to influence him in my favor. So? Could the Christian really be more deeply rooted in me than the Jew is in him? Who has such self-knowledge? How could I begrudge him the little theft he committed, under such circumstances, against a Christian? Of course, it was no small bundle of loot, such a creature! Creature? And whose? Does she belong to the slave who cast the block onto the desolate shore of life and then left? Doesn't she much more rightfully belong to the artist who traced the divine form into the abandoned block? Oh! Recha's true father remains—despite the Christian who engendered her—remains forever the Jew. When I simply think of her as a Christian girl without thinking of everything I believe such a Jew was able to give her: tell me, heart! What about her would please you? Nothing! Hardly anything! Even her smile would be nothing but the gentle, pretty pulling of her muscles. What made her smile, as it clothed itself in her mouth, would be unworthy of the impulse. No, not even her smile! I've seen much more beautiful smiles wasted on foolishness, on nonsense, on ridicule, on flatterers and lovers! Did they enchant me then? Did they draw from me the wish to spend my life fluttering in their sunshine? I should think not. And yet I'm angry at the one who alone gave her this higher worth? How could that be? Why? Perhaps I deserved the ridicule that Saladin dismissed me with! It's bad enough that Saladin could believe it! How small I must have seemed to him! How contemptible! And all that for a girl? Curd! Curd! That won't do. Turn around! And what if Daja just blathered something that can hardly be proved? Look, there he is stepping out of his house, absorbed in conversation! Oh! With whom? With him? With my friar? Oh! Then he must know everything! He's been betrayed to the Patriarch! Oh! What a blockhead I am! What have I done? How a single spark of passion can burn so much of one's brain! I must quickly decide what to do now! I'll hide here and watch them. Maybe the friar will leave.

Scene 4

Nathan and the Friar.

NATHAN: [*Coming nearer.*] Thank you again, good brother!

FRIAR: And the same to you!

NATHAN: Me? From you? What for? For my obstinacy in forcing onto you what you don't need? If only my obstinacy hadn't yielded to yours, if only you hadn't wanted so forcefully to be richer than I am.[51]

FRIAR: Besides, the book doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the daughter. It's the daughter's entire inheritance from her father, so to speak. Now, of course, she has you. May God only grant that you never regret having done so much for her!

NATHAN: Can I do that? I can never do that! Don't worry!

FRIAR: Now, now! The Patriarchs and the Templars . . .

NATHAN: Could never do me so much harm that I would regret anything, let alone that! And are you absolutely sure it was a Templar who's been stirring up your Patriarch?

FRIAR: It could hardly be anyone else. A Templar spoke with him shortly beforehand, and what I heard sounded like this.

NATHAN: But there is now only one Templar in Jerusalem. And this one I know. This one is my friend. A young, noble, sincere man!

FRIAR: Quite right, he's the one! But what one is, and what one has to be in the world, these don't always fit together.

NATHAN: Unfortunately not. So let him, whoever he may be, do his worst or his best! With your book, brother, I'll stand up to anyone, and I'll go straight to the Sultan with it.

FRIAR: Good luck! So I'll leave you here.

NATHAN: And without having seen her even once? Just come quickly, just come again often. If only the Patriarch hasn't heard anything yet! But what does that matter? Tell him today whatever you like.

FRIAR: I won't. Farewell! [*Exit.*]

NATHAN: Don't forget us, brother! God! If only I could fall down on my knees right here and now in the open air! How the knot that so

[51] Nathan means that by refusing Nathan's charity, the friar became morally or spiritually richer.

often made me afraid is now loosening by itself! God! How light I'm becoming now that I have nothing left on earth to hide! Now that I can walk so freely before human beings as I do before you, who alone do not have to judge human beings by their deeds, which so rarely are their deeds, oh God!

Scene 5

Nathan and the Templar coming up to him from the side.

TEMPLAR: Hey! Wait, Nathan. Take me with you!

NATHAN: Who's calling? Is it you, knight? Where were you that I couldn't meet you at the Sultan's?

TEMPLAR: We missed each other. No offense.

NATHAN: None taken. But Saladin . . .

TEMPLAR: You had just left . . .

NATHAN: Then you did speak to him? Well then, everything's okay.

TEMPLAR: But he wants to speak to both of us together.

NATHAN: All the better. Just come with me. I was on my way to him.

TEMPLAR: May I ask you, Nathan, who just left you?

NATHAN: But don't you know him?

TEMPLAR: Wasn't that the good fellow, the lay brother the Patriarch likes so much to use as a spy?

NATHAN: Maybe! He is in the Patriarch's service.

TEMPLAR: That's not a bad trick, sending simplicity before committing villainy.

NATHAN: Yes, if the simple one is stupid, not pious.

TEMPLAR: No Patriarch believes in piety.

NATHAN: I can vouch for this one. He would never help the Patriarch carry out anything improper.

TEMPLAR: At least that's how he acts. But didn't he say anything to you about me?

NATHAN: About you? He didn't say anything about you by name. After all, he hardly knows your name.

TEMPLAR: Hardly.

NATHAN: It's true, he did say something to me about a Templar . . .

TEMPLAR: And what?

NATHAN: Something that couldn't possibly have applied to you.

TEMPLAR: Who knows? Let's hear.

NATHAN: That someone accused me before the Patriarch . . .

TEMPLAR: Accused you? That is, no offense to him, a lie. Listen to me, Nathan! I'm not the sort of person who's inclined to deny anything he's done. What I did, I did! But I'm also not the sort of person who wants to justify everything he's done as a good deed. Why should I be ashamed of a fault? Don't I have the firm resolve to correct it? And don't I know how far such resolve can take people? Listen to me, Nathan! I really am the Templar the lay brother was talking about, the one who supposedly accused you. Now you know what made me angry! What made my blood boil in all its veins! What a fool I am! I came to throw myself so completely with body and soul into your arms. The way you received me, so cold, so lukewarm (and lukewarm is worse than cold). How diligently reserved you were as you turned away from me. How you answered me with questions that seemed to come out of thin air. I can hardly think about it even now when I ought to be calm. Listen to me, Nathan! While I was so agitated, Daja crept up behind me and hit me on the head with the secret that seemed to contain the explanation for your mysterious behavior.

NATHAN: How's that?

TEMPLAR: Let me finish! I imagined that you didn't want to lose again to a Christian what you once rescued from a Christian. And so it occurred to me to place the knife at your throat. That's the story, nice and short.

NATHAN: Nice and short? Nice? Where's the nice part?

TEMPLAR: Listen to me, Nathan! It's true, what I did wasn't right! You're not in the least guilty. That fool Daja doesn't know what she's talking about. She's spiteful toward you, only wants to get you in trouble. Maybe! Maybe! I'm a young fool who goes from one extreme to the other. I either do too much or too little. That too may be the case! Forgive me, Nathan.

NATHAN: If you put it that way, certainly . . .

TEMPLAR: In short, I went to the Patriarch! But didn't name you. That's a lie, as I said! I only told him of the case in general terms to get his opinion. That too didn't have to take place, I admit it! After

all, didn't I already know the Patriarch was a scoundrel? Couldn't I have gone straight to you to hear what you had to say? Did I have to put the poor girl in danger of losing such a father? Well, what does that matter? The Patriarch's vile nature, which always remains the same, quickly brought me back to myself. Listen to me, Nathan! Let me finish! Supposing he did know your name, what then? What then? He can only take the girl from you when she doesn't belong to anyone but you. He can only drag her out of *your* house into a convent. So—give her to me! Just give her to me, and let him come. Ha! He won't dare take my wife away from me. Give her to me, quickly! Whether she's really your daughter or not! Whether she's Christian or Jewish or nothing! It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter! I'll never ask you about it again in my entire life, neither now nor ever. It doesn't matter!

NATHAN: Do you imagine it's important to me to conceal the truth?

TEMPLAR: It doesn't matter!

NATHAN: I've never denied to you or anyone else who was fit to know that she's a Christian and only my adoptive daughter. But why I haven't let her know, it's only to her that I have to explain that.

TEMPLAR: You shouldn't even have to explain that to her. Allow her never to see you with different eyes! Spare her the discovery! You're still the one, the only one who's in charge of her. Give her to me! I beg you, Nathan. Give her to me! I'm the only one who can and will save her a second time.

NATHAN: Yes, could have! Could have! But can't anymore. For that it's too late.

TEMPLAR: Why too late?

NATHAN: Thanks to the Patriarch . . .

TEMPLAR: The Patriarch? Thanks? Thanks to him? What for? How could *he* deserve our thanks? What for? What for?

NATHAN: That we now know whom she's related to, now know whom she can safely be handed over to.

TEMPLAR: Let the Devil thank the Patriarch. He has other things to thank him for as well!

NATHAN: From these relatives' hands you too must receive her, and not from mine.

TEMPLAR: Poor Recha! What you have to endure! What would be lucky

for another orphan is your misfortune! Nathan! And where are they, these relatives?

NATHAN: Where are they?

TEMPLAR: And who are they?

NATHAN: In particular a brother has turned up, and you need to ask him for her.

TEMPLAR: A brother? What is he, this brother? A soldier? A priest? Let's hear what I have to expect.

NATHAN: I think he's neither of the two, or both. I don't know him well yet.

TEMPLAR: And what else?

NATHAN: A good man whom Recha won't be badly off with.

TEMPLAR: But a Christian! Right now I still don't know what to think of you. Don't take it the wrong way, Nathan. But won't she have to play the Christian among Christians? And won't she finally become what she's played long enough? Won't the weeds finally suffocate the pure wheat that you've sown? And you care so little about that? Despite that you, *you* can say that she won't be badly off with her brother?

NATHAN: I think so! I hope so! And if she should be lacking anything with him, won't she always have you and me?

TEMPLAR: Oh, what could she be lacking with him? Won't the dear brother provide his dear sister with plenty of food and clothing, good food and fine clothing? And what more could a dear sister want?[52] Of course, a husband too! Well, well, that too, that too the dear brother will find in time; if he can be found. The more Christian, the better! Nathan, Nathan! What an angel you've formed to be spoiled by the poor craftsmanship of others!

NATHAN: There's no risk of that! He'll show himself to be worthy of our love.

TEMPLAR: Don't say that! Don't say that about *my* love! Mine isn't suppressed by anything, anything, however little! Not even by names! But wait! Does she suspect at all what's happening to her?

[52]Rather than using the normal terms for brother (*Bruder*) and sister (*Schwester*), the Templar uses the diminutives *Brüderchen* and *Schwesterchen*. These untranslatable terms—"brotherlet" and "sisterlet" are not words in English—suggest affection, but in the context of the Templar's anger they are clearly being used sarcastically.

NATHAN: It's possible, though I wouldn't know how.

TEMPLAR: It doesn't matter. In any case she should, she must learn from me first what threatens her fate. I've given up the idea that I wouldn't see her or speak to her until I had the right to call her mine. I have to hurry . . .

NATHAN: Wait! Where?

TEMPLAR: To her! To see if this girl's soul is truly brave enough to make the only decision worthy of it!

NATHAN: *Which* decision?

TEMPLAR: This one: not to ask either you or her brother.

NATHAN: And?

TEMPLAR: And to follow me, even if she should have to become the wife of a Muslim.[53]

NATHAN: Wait! You won't find her. She's with Sittah, the Sultan's sister.

TEMPLAR: Since when? Why?

NATHAN: And if you want to meet the brother at the same time, just come with me.

TEMPLAR: The brother? Which one? Sittah's or Recha's?

NATHAN: Maybe both. Just come with me! Please, come! [*He leads him away.*]

Scene 6

Scene: In Sittah's harem.

Sittah and Recha engaged in conversation.

SITTAH: How happy I am for you, sweet girl! Don't be so anxious, so afraid, so shy! Be cheerful! Be more talkative, more comfortable!

RECHA: Princess . . .

SITTAH: But no! Not "princess"! Call me Sittah, your friend, your sister. Call me Mom! I could be your mother, after all. So young! So bright! So good! What don't you know? What haven't you read?

RECHA: Read? Sittah, you're making fun of your silly little sister. I can hardly read.

[53]The Templar means that he is willing to become a Muslim if the Sultan requires him to before allowing him to marry Recha.

SITTAH: Can hardly read? You're lying!

RECHA: A little of my father's handwriting! I thought you were talking about books.

SITTAH: Absolutely! About books.

RECHA: Well, it's really hard for me to read books!

SITTAH: Seriously?

RECHA: Quite seriously. My father isn't too fond of cold book-learning, which only impresses dead signs into the brain.

SITTAH: Oh, what are you saying? On the other hand he's not entirely wrong. And yet you know so much . . .

RECHA: I only know what came from his mouth, and for most of these things I could tell you how, where, and why he taught them to me.

SITTAH: So everything holds together better. So you learn with your entire soul.

RECHA: Certainly you haven't read much if at all!

SITTAH: Why? I'm not proud to say the opposite. But why? What are your reasons? Speak openly. Your reasons?

RECHA: You're so modest, so unpretentious, so completely yourself . . .

SITTAH: Well?

RECHA: My father says books rarely allow us to be that way.

SITTAH: Oh what a man your father is!

RECHA: Isn't it true?

SITTAH: How close to the mark he always hits!

RECHA: Isn't it true? And yet, this father . . .

SITTAH: What's the matter, dear?

RECHA: This father . . .

SITTAH: God! You're crying?

RECHA: And this father . . . Oh! It has to come out! My heart needs air, needs air . . . [*Overcome with tears, throws herself at Sittah's feet.*]

SITTAH: Child, what's happening to you? Recha?

RECHA: This father . . . I'm going to lose!

SITTAH: You? Lose? Him? How's that? Calm down! Never! Stand up!

RECHA: You shouldn't have offered in vain to be my friend, my sister!

SITTAH: But I am! I am! Just stand up! Otherwise I'll have to call for help.

RECHA: [*Pulling herself together and standing up.*] Oh, pardon me! Forgive me! My pain made me forget who you are. Sittah doesn't allow crying or desperation. Only cold, calm reason carries weight with her. Whoever uses this in pleading his case to her wins!

SITTAH: Well then?

RECHA: No. My friend, my sister will never allow this! Will never allow me to be forced onto another father!

SITTAH: Another father? Forced upon you? Who could do that? Who would want to do that, dear?

RECHA: Who? My good, evil Daja could want to do that, claims to be able to do that. Well, don't you know this good, evil Daja? God forgive her for this! Reward her for the other things! She has proved herself capable of so much good and so much evil toward me!

SITTAH: Evil toward you? Then she must truly have little good in her.

RECHA: On the contrary! She has quite a lot. Quite a lot!

SITTAH: Who is she?

RECHA: A Christian woman who cared for me in my childhood, who cared for me so well—you won't believe me—that I hardly regretted not having a mother! God bless her for that! But who also frightened and tormented me so badly!

SITTAH: And over what? Why? How?

RECHA: Oh! The poor woman—let me tell you—is a Christian, has to torment out of love. She's one of those fanatics who imagine they know the universal and only true path to God!

SITTAH: Now I understand!

RECHA: And who feel compelled to lead everyone who strays from this path back onto it. But she could hardly do otherwise. After all, if it's true that this is the only true path, how could we allow her to see her friends walk another one, one that leads to ruin, to eternal ruin? It would have to be possible to love and hate the same person at the same time. But it isn't this that's finally forced me to complain so openly about her. I could have gladly endured even longer her sighs, her warnings, her praying, her threats. Gladly! That always brought me to good and useful thoughts. And who isn't flattered to feel so worthy and dear to someone that this person cannot bear the thought of having to give one up forever?

SITTAH: Very true!

RECHA: Only, only, *that's* going too far! I can't offer any resistance to that. No patience, no consideration, nothing!

SITTAH: What? To what?

RECHA: What she just now revealed to me.

SITTAH: Revealed? And just now?

RECHA: Just now! On the way here we came to a ruined Christian chapel. Suddenly she stood still, seemed to be struggling with herself, looked with moist eyes toward heaven, then toward me. "Come," she finally said. "Let's take a shortcut through this chapel." She goes, I follow her, and my eyes sweep with dread through the tottering ruins. Now she stops again, and I find myself with her on the sunken steps of a rotting altar. How I felt when she fell to my feet with hot tears and wringing her hands . . .

SITTAH: Poor child!

RECHA: And swore by the Virgin Mary, who had answered so many other prayers and performed so many miracles—swore with a look of true sympathy—to have pity on me! And asked her forgiveness for having to reveal to me the claims that her church had on me.

SITTAH: [*Aside:* The poor thing! I suspected as much!]

RECHA: She told me that I was of Christian blood, that I was baptized, that I wasn't Nathan's daughter, that he wasn't my father! God! God! That he's not my father! Sittah! Sittah! Look, I'm at your feet again . . .

SITTAH: Recha! No! Stand up! My brother's coming! Stand up!

Scene 7

Saladin and the previous.

SALADIN: What's going on here, Sittah?

SITTAH: She's beside herself! God!

SALADIN: Who is it?

SITTAH: You know, don't you?

SALADIN: Our Nathan's daughter? What's the matter with her?

SITTAH: Get a hold of yourself, child! The Sultan . . .

RECHA: [*Dragging herself on her knees to Saladin's feet, her head sunk toward the ground.*] I won't stand up! Won't stand up unless—don't

want to see his face unless—don't want to admire the reflection of eternal righteousness and goodness in his eyes and on his brow . . .

SALADIN: Stand . . . stand up!

RECHA: Unless he promises me . . .

SALADIN: Come! I promise . . . whatever it may be!

RECHA: No more, no less, than to let me keep my father, and to let him keep me! I still don't know who else claims, or can claim, to be my father. Nor do I want to know. But is it only blood that makes the father? Only blood?

SALADIN: [*Lifting her up.*] I understand! Who was so cruel as to put such ideas into your head, into *your* head? Is it certain? Has it been proved?

RECHA: Must have been! Since Daja claims to know it from my wet nurse.

SALADIN: From your wet nurse!

RECHA: Who, while she was dying, felt compelled to entrust it to her.

SALADIN: Just dying! And not raving too? And even if it were true! Truly blood, blood alone does not make the father! It hardly makes the father of an animal! At the most it confers the right to earn that name! Don't be afraid! And do you know what? As soon as two fathers start to fight over you, leave both of them. Take the third! Take me as your father!

SITTAH: Oh do it! Do it!

SALADIN: I want to be a good father, a really good father! But wait! I've just thought of something better. Why do you need fathers at all? What if they were to die? Why not look for a man who stands to outlive us? Don't you know any?

SITTAH: Don't make her blush!

SALADIN: That was precisely my intention. Blushing makes the ugly so beautiful. Shouldn't it make the beautiful even more beautiful? I've sent for your father Nathan and another man as well. Can you guess who he is? Come here! With your permission, Sittah?

SITTAH: Brother!

SALADIN: May you blush quite a bit when you see him, dear girl!

RECHA: When I see whom? Blush?

SALADIN: Don't be coy! Okay, then, go pale if you prefer! As you like,

and can! [*A slave woman enters and approaches Sittah.*] Aren't they here yet?

SITTAH: [*To the slave woman.*] Good, just let them in. There they are, brother!

Final Scene

Enter Nathan and the Templar.

SALADIN: Ah, my good, dear friends! You, you, Nathan, I must tell you first of all that you can have your money back as soon as you like!

NATHAN: Sultan!

SALADIN: Now I'm at your service . . .

NATHAN: Sultan!

SALADIN: The caravan is here. I'm richer now than I've been in a long time. Come, tell me what you need to undertake something big! After all, you business people can never have too much cash!

NATHAN: But why start off with this trifle? I see here eyes in tears; to dry them is much more important to me. [*goes to Recha*] You've been crying? What's the matter? Aren't you still my daughter?

RECHA: My father!

NATHAN: We understand each other. Enough! Be happy! Be calm! As long as your heart is still yours! As long as no other loss threatens your heart! You haven't lost your father!

RECHA: None, no other!

TEMPLAR: No other? Well, then I've deceived myself! What you've never been afraid of losing you've never thought nor wished to have. Just fine! Just fine! That changes everything, Nathan! Saladin, we came here at your command. But I misled you. Now I won't trouble you any further!

SALADIN: There you go losing your temper again, young man! Does everything have to go your way? Does everyone have to guess your thoughts?

TEMPLAR: But don't you hear? Don't you see, Sultan?

SALADIN: Oh yes! It's bad enough that you weren't surer of your case!

TEMPLAR: I am now.

SALADIN: Whoever takes advantage of a good deed hasn't done a good

deed after all. What you've saved isn't for that reason your property. If it were, then the robber who ran after his loot in a fire would be as good a hero as you! [*Going to Recha to lead her to the Templar.*] Come, dear girl, come! Don't take him so literally. After all, if he weren't so hot-tempered and proud he wouldn't have bothered to save you. You have to count one deed against the other. Come, shame him! Do what's appropriate to him! Admit your love for him! Propose to him! And if he rejects you, if he ever forgets how much more you've done for him in this step than he ever did for you—What did he do for you? Got a little smoky. Bravo!—if he mistreats you in this way then he has nothing of my brother Assad, nothing! Then he only wears his shell and doesn't have his heart. Come, dear . . .

SITTAH: Go, go dear! Go! It's hardly anything considering your gratitude; it's really nothing.

NATHAN: Stop, Saladin! Stop, Sittah!

SALADIN: You too?

NATHAN: There's another person who needs to be consulted about this.

SALADIN: Who would deny that? Undeniably such a foster father should have a say in this! The first, if you like. You see, I know the whole state of affairs.

NATHAN: Not completely! I'm not talking about myself. There's another person. Another person altogether, Saladin, whose voice I would first like to hear.

SALADIN: Who?

NATHAN: Her brother!

SALADIN: Recha's brother?

NATHAN: Yes!

RECHA: My brother? So I have a brother?

TEMPLAR: [*Coming out of his wild, mute distraction.*] Where? Where is he, this brother? Not here yet? I'm supposed to meet him here.

NATHAN: Just be patient!

TEMPLAR: [*Very bitterly.*] He already imposed a father on her. Is it surprising he should find a brother too?

SALADIN: That's the last straw! Christian! Such a vile suspicion would never have come across my Assad's lips. Anyway! Continue!

NATHAN: Forgive him! I'm happy to forgive him. Who knows what we would think in his place and at his age! [*Going up to him in a friendly manner.*] Of course, knight! Mild mistrust leads to real suspicion! If only you had told me your *real* name right away . . .

TEMPLAR: What?

NATHAN: You're not a Stauffen!

TEMPLAR: Then who am I?

NATHAN: Your name isn't Curd von Stauffen!

TEMPLAR: What is my name, then?

NATHAN: Your name is Leu von Filnek.

TEMPLAR: What?

NATHAN: You're surprised?

TEMPLAR: Shouldn't I be? Who says that's my name?

NATHAN: I do, and I can tell you even more. Now I'm not accusing you of lying.

TEMPLAR: You're not?

NATHAN: It's still possible that you have a right to that name too.

TEMPLAR: I should hope so! [*Aside:* He's lucky God made him say that!]

NATHAN: Because your mother, she was a Stauffen. Her brother, your uncle, who raised you, whom your parents left you with in Germany when that raw climate drove them back to this country—he was called Curd von Stauffen. He may even have adopted you! Has it been a long time since you came over here with him? And is he still alive?

TEMPLAR: What should I say? Nathan! That's right! It is! He himself is dead. I first came here with the last reinforcements of our order. But, but . . . what does all this have to do with Recha's brother?

NATHAN: Your father . . .

TEMPLAR: What? You knew him too? Him too?

NATHAN: He was my friend.

TEMPLAR: Your friend? Is it possible, Nathan!

NATHAN: His name was Wolf von Filnek, but he wasn't a German . . .

TEMPLAR: You know that too?

NATHAN: He was only married to a German. He had only followed your mother for a short time to Germany . . .

TEMPLAR: Enough! Please! What about Recha's brother? Recha's brother . . .

NATHAN: You're her brother!

TEMPLAR: I am? I'm her brother?

RECHA: He's my brother?

SITTAH: Brother and sister!

SALADIN: They're brother and sister!

RECHA: [*Approaching him.*] Oh! My brother!

TEMPLAR: [*Stepping back.*] Her brother!

RECHA: [*Stops and turns toward Nathan.*] It can't be! Can't be! His heart knows nothing of this! We're impostors! God!

SALADIN: [*To the Templar.*] Impostors? What? Do you think so? Can you think so? You're the impostor! Everything about you is a lie: face and voice and walk! Nothing is yours! To refuse to recognize such a sister! Go!

TEMPLAR: [*Humbly coming nearer to him.*] Don't misunderstand my surprise, Sultan! Don't undervalue in a single moment, in which you scarcely saw your Assad, both him and me! [*Hurrying to Nathan.*] Nathan, you've taken from and given to me with full hands! No! You've given me more than you've taken from me! Infinitely more! [*Throwing his arms around Recha's shoulders.*] Oh! My sister! My sister!

NATHAN: Blanda von Filnek.

TEMPLAR: Blanda? Blanda? Not Recha? Not your Recha anymore? God! You're disowning her! You're giving her back her Christian name! You're disowning her on my account! Nathan! Nathan! Why are you making her pay for this? Her?

NATHAN: What do you mean? Oh, my children! My children! Don't you think my daughter's brother would be my child, as long as he wanted to be?

[*While they give themselves over to hugging each other, Saladin walks with uneasy astonishment toward his sister.*]

SALADIN: What do you say, sister?

SITTAH: I'm touched . . .

SALADIN: And I'm, I'm nearly recoiling before a greater emotion! Just prepare yourself for it as well as you can.

SITTAH: What?

SALADIN: Nathan, just a word! A word!

[*While Nathan steps over to him, Sittah steps over to the brother and sister to share the moment with them; Nathan and Saladin speak more softly.*]

SALADIN: Listen, just listen, Nathan! Didn't you just say . . .

NATHAN: What?

SALADIN: Her father wasn't from Germany, wasn't a German by birth. What was he then? Where did he come from?

NATHAN: He never wanted to tell. From his mouth I know nothing about it.

SALADIN: And so he wasn't another kind of Frank? Not a European?

NATHAN: Oh! He wasn't. He admitted that much. He preferred to speak Persian.

SALADIN: Persian? Persian? What more do I want? It's him! It was him!

NATHAN: Who?

SALADIN: My brother! Quite certainly! My Assad! Quite certainly!

NATHAN: Well, if you think that yourself, verify it in this book! [*Handing him the breviary.*]

SALADIN: [*Eagerly opening it.*] Ah! His handwriting! I recognize that too!

NATHAN: They still don't know anything of this! It's up to you alone how much they know of it.

SALADIN: [*Flipping through the book.*] Me, not recognize my brother's children? My niece and nephew—my children? Not recognize them? Me? Leave them to you? [*Aloud again.*] It's them! It's them, Sittah! Them! It's them! They're both my . . . your brother's children! [*He runs to join them in their hugs.*]

SITTAH: [*Following him.*] What am I hearing? How could it possibly be otherwise?

SALADIN: [*To the Templar.*] Now you have to love me, you have to, you stubborn boy! [*To Recha.*] Now am I not what I asked your permission to be? Whether you like it or not!

SITTAH: So am I! So am I!

SALADIN: [*To the Templar again.*] My son! My Assad! My Assad's son!

TEMPLAR: I'm from your blood! So those bedtime stories they used to tell me were more than stories! [*Falling to his feet.*]

SALADIN: [*Lifting him up.*] Look at this scoundrel! He knew something of this, and nearly made me his murderer! Just you wait!

[*The curtain falls to silent, repeated hugs from all sides.*]